

ECONOMIC NOTES
ON
ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL WAGES



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ECONOMIC NOTES ON ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL WAGES

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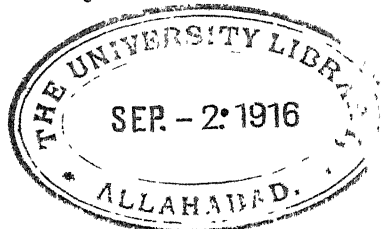
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Il n'est ni roi, ni prince,
Ni ducque, ni seigneur,
Qui n'vive de la peine
Du pauvre laboureur.

(Traditional Chanson)

Those who can only just keep themselves afloat
are the ones to drag others under.—TURGENEV.



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ST. MARTIN'S STREET, LONDON

1914

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TO
MY FRIEND
HEDLEY DURRAN

PREFACE

IN this little book I have tried to answer the question, whether it is possible to raise agricultural wages in England, without the advantages of the change being outweighed by disadvantageous consequences. More particularly, the argument is concerned with the policy of establishing minimum agricultural wage-rates by law.

I have made no attempt in the following pages to gauge the poverty of the farm labourer or to estimate the distresses of his lot, except, indeed, in so far as a consideration of these things is essential to the economic argument. My reason for thus limiting the inquiry is a simple one. I believe that a demonstration of the possibility of improvement is a sufficient reason for action, without the sentimental appeal provided by a tale of horror.

Though my book is small, I am heavily in debt over it. I owe thanks to Professor Edgeworth for his kindness in reading the section which deals with the policy of reducing rents to meet the cost of increased wages; to Sir William Osler for advice on the relation of under-feeding to measurable

physique; to Major Brackenridge of the Army Medical Corps for allowing me to inspect the recruiting books at Cowley Barracks; and to Mr. Adolphus Ballard for rescuing me from several errors in regard to the law of landlord and tenant. It is especially pleasant to record my various obligations and to express my gratitude to four colleagues in the Workers' Educational Association. Mr. P. A. Brown, Lecturer in Economics in the University of Durham, and Mr. A. G. Heath, Fellow of New College, Oxford, have helped me with many criticisms and suggestions. Mr. Arthur Ashby, of Ruskin College, has allowed me to draw without stint from his large store of knowledge about rural economic conditions. And Mr. W. T. Layton, University Lecturer in Economics at Cambridge, generously lent me an unpublished treatise of his own on the history of recent wage-movements in England, which enabled me to check much of the information that I had collected for my second chapter. I am also grateful to the School Medical Officers of a large number of counties for gifts of some most valuable reports—gifts which were all the more kind because they were made to a stranger—and to the Editor of the *Economic Review* for permission to use an article of mine which he published in October 1912. Lastly, I am indebted to my father, the Rev. V. R. Lennard, who obtained for me a great part of the information contained in the Table on pages 57-59, and gave me

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unwearying help in the verification of statistical calculations. But thanks for particular acts of kindness seem, somehow, ludicrous in their insufficiency, when offered to one to whom my debt in general is so immeasurably great.

REGINALD LENNARD.

LOWER HEYFORD,
January 14, 1914.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM STATED

THE question whether British agriculture could afford higher wages to those engaged in it has been much discussed of late in political circles, but for the economist this question is too vague and general to admit of a simple answer. It really consists of a bundle of questions, each of which must be considered by itself.

1. There is, first of all, the question whether agricultural labourers in general sell their labour more cheaply than other wage-earners. More precisely one must ask whether those who are employed upon the least productive tasks in agriculture receive in wages a smaller proportion of the value of their product than that paid to the men who perform the least productive tasks in other industries. Is the dearest labour in agriculture cheaper to the employer than the dearest labour in other trades?¹ This can only be determined by

¹ By the "dearest labour" I do not, of course, mean that of the individual whose personal incompetence makes him the most unprofitable servant to his employer. I mean the labour which is paid the same as other labour but is directed to the least profitable tasks—that is to say, the labour of what economists call the "marginal man." In technical language, the problem is to discover whether wages fall short of the "marginal net product of labour" by a greater amount in agriculture than in other industries. I

an inquiry into the conditions under which agricultural labourers sell their services, and especially into the possibilities of collective bargaining and of competition between the agricultural and other labour markets. The inquiry will need to be supplemented by a consideration of the actual expectations of profit which appear to obtain in English agriculture to-day. And if it appears from the evidence that agricultural labour is peculiarly "cheap" in the sense in which that word is used above, then it will be easy to conclude that the wages of all the farm-labourers in the country might be raised without the expectations of profit for the farmer being reduced below the level which obtains in other industries. On the other hand, even if it cannot be shown that agricultural labour in general is cheap, it does not follow that a general rise in

am aware that this is not the only sense in which labour in a particular industry may be said to be "cheap." An employer's labour force may be obtained cheaply as a whole, even though the man whose product is least valuable is paid the full value, or nearly the full value, of the tasks he performs. Though the labour of the "marginal" man may be dear, that of the "intra-marginal" workers may be peculiarly cheap. To take the simplest concrete illustration, we may suppose that in each of two fields two men of equal efficiency are employed in weeding, and that each of these four men receives in wages 3s. 1d. a day. In the one field the value of the crop may be increased to the extent of 5s. by the weeding which one man could accomplish in a day, while the addition of the second workman may only add a further 3s. 1d. to the value of the crop. In the other field there may not be so much difference between the value of the more necessary and the less necessary weeding. The weeding done by one man may be worth 4s.; that done by two may be worth 7s. 6d. In this second case the labour of the two men taken together is dearer, but that of the second man cheaper by 5d. than in the first case. This difference is due solely to the varying productivity of the tasks to which the labour is applied, for *ex hypothesi* all four men are of equal personal efficiency. In regard to the practical question of the effects produced by a compulsory rise in wages, the difference between the two cases is of the greatest importance. A minimum wage of 3s. 3d. would in the first case make it pay the farmer to dismiss his second man, but it would only reduce his profits on the weeding from 2s. 1d. to 1s. 9d. In the second case it would still pay to employ two men after the minimum wage had been enforced, but the farmer would only make 1s. instead of 1s. 6d. out of the weeding.

agricultural wages is economically impossible. On the face of things it is conceivable that a rise in wages might produce other changes which would facilitate the management of the industry under the new conditions. It might lead to a proportionate increase in the personal efficiency of the labourers, so that the labour remained as cheap as before, in spite of the rise in wages. The rise might, again, stimulate the employers to a more energetic and careful application of their existing knowledge and skill, with the result that the better direction of the labour force increased the product of labour in proportion to the improvement in its reward. Or, on the other hand, one may ask whether readjustment might not be induced in the relations of landlord and tenant or in those of producer and consumer. Could the burden of a rise in wages be shifted to the landlord by a reduction in rent, or to the consumer of agricultural produce by a rise in prices? Besides, quite apart from indirect consequences of the upward movement of wages, other changes causally unconnected with it might further, as of course they might also hinder, that movement. Fortuitous alterations in price levels or new agricultural inventions might make it easier for farmers to pay their men more. Or deliberate measures might be adopted with this end in view. Grants for agricultural development, the establishment of a tariff designed to protect the farmer, the better organisation of agricultural education, and changes in the law of landlord and tenant are all possible means of readjustment.

2. Distinct from the question whether agricultural labour in general is cheap, and distinct from

the various other questions which have reference to the possibility of a general rise in agricultural wages, is the problem of particular groups of farm labourers. If the wages of *all* cannot be raised, is an increase of wages possible for *some*? If a general improvement is attainable, may some hope for a greater advance than others? It is not, of course, a question of isolated individuals. The field-glass of the statistician does not enable him to discern the circumstances of the individual with precision, and, if legislation is contemplated, it is clear that State action can only be applied to classes of men, and cannot be addressed to individual cases. The inquiry must be confined to particular grades of labour or to the labourers of particular districts, and the first question to be asked in this inquiry is not whether farm labourers sell their labour more cheaply than other workers, but whether certain groups of farm servants sell their labour cheaper than other groups. It is certainly conceivable that a particular grade of agricultural labour may be relatively underpaid. For example, where the real wages of the lowest grade of labour are very low, the wants which any addition to those wages will satisfy are bound to be very urgent wants, and therefore, it may be argued, the desire to win a footing on the higher grades of labour, where greater toil and higher real wages are found, will be peculiarly strong. As a result, competition may make labour on these higher grades cheaper to the employer than it is on the grade where real wages are lowest. The higher grades, though receiving higher wages, may, in consequence of this competition, be less well paid than the lower grades, if we

measure wages in relation to the value of the product. On the other hand, it may be urged that where the ordinary farm labourers get extremely low wages they are likely to be underfed, and that, since underfeeding does not necessarily imply hunger, they may dislike additional toil more than they covet additional wages. In this case it may be that only individuals of exceptionally good physique or unusual ambition will enter into competition for such posts as those of head carter, cowman, and shepherd. These men may therefore have a scarcity value: they may command a monopoly price, so to say, for their labour. The cost of labour will therefore be greater on the higher than on the lower grades, and the lower, not the higher, grades will be the more susceptible of a rise in wages. It seems impossible on general grounds to choose between these two lines of argument, and cases such as those imagined here involve problems which belong rather to the physiologist and the psychologist than to the student of economics. But such factors as those mentioned above probably do make the possibilities of raising wages different in degree on the different grades of labour.

On the whole, however, an inquiry into the special possibilities of a rise in the wages of certain groups of agricultural labourers will be concerned not so much with the conditions of particular grades of labour as with the conditions of different geographical districts. This is a consequence of two elementary facts of English rural life—the difficulty of competition between the rural labour of different shires and the large variations in the real

wages of farm labourers throughout the country. In an inquiry of this kind attention must by no means be confined to the question of the relative cheapness of labour in the different districts. With regard to the counties where wages are lowest, it is especially important to consider the possibility that a rise in wages may put a stop to underfeeding and so lead to an improvement in the industrial quality of the labourers. In that case a rise in wages may not make the labour any dearer, so that the question whether it was or was not peculiarly cheap to start with becomes relatively unimportant. Again, as in the consideration of agricultural wages in general, so here too it must be remembered that the upward movement of wages in a particular locality may be facilitated by changes which are not themselves consequences of the wage-movement. For instance, the enforcement of a minimum wage, which otherwise would produce unemployment in a given district, might be rendered innocuous by the growth of a town which increased the demand for certain kinds of produce and made more intensive tillage profitable, or by the making of a new line of railway which improved the facilities for marketing produce.

3. After surveying the conditions of agricultural labour as a whole, and of the labour of certain groups of agricultural workers in particular, it becomes necessary to inquire more closely what is meant by the assertion that an increase in wages is "possible" or "impossible." If no stipulation is made as to the unemployment or other distress which an agricultural minimum wage might produce, then it is obvious that a rise in agricultural wages is "possible." If the number of farm labourers was

reduced, if the better lands alone were cultivated, and if only the more productive of agricultural tasks were undertaken at all, then clearly the least productive tasks that were still performed would be so much more valuable than many tasks upon which labourers are now employed, that the farmers could well afford to pay their employees more. But these conditions would, on the face of things, imply the dismissal and unemployment of many men, and would at the same time rob some farmers of their occupation and reduce the incomes of the landlords. The shrinkage of the cultivated area would lessen the opportunities for farming enterprise, and, while the poorer lands ceased to repay cultivation at all, the better lands would no longer repay it to the same extent as now, so that landlords would be forced to acquiesce in a reduction of rent.¹ On the other hand, if it is obvious that a rise in agricultural wages is "possible" so long as we do not regard resultant distress as an obstacle to this "possibility," it seems unlikely that any advance in wages could be achieved without "distress" of some kind or other being inflicted upon some persons. Probably every change is bought at some price, though the change may be well worth that price. Even when farmers can meet an increase in the cost of labour by the exercise of greater care, energy, and intelligence, a force which compels them to improve their methods will almost certainly cause them some distress through the strain involved

¹ I assume in the text that the rent actually paid is "economic" or "Ricardian." Where it falls short of this, and part of the Ricardian rent is really appropriated by the tenant, the conditions reviewed above might only cause loss to the farmer. The fall in "rent" might be concealed under the form of a decline in farming profits.

in adapting themselves to new conditions, and this is so, however true it may be that, in the long run, a life of wakeful industry and alertness is happier than one of sluggish routine. Again, when labourers respond to a rise in wages by an increase in efficiency, they probably feel the stress of "speeding up" for some time, and though their wives may be freed from many anxieties and enabled to purchase comforts unattainable before, these in all likelihood feel some loss through the greater toil in cooking which more frequent hot meals necessitate.

These considerations bring us directly to the kernel of the whole problem as it presents itself to the view of the practical statesman. We are faced by the question whether the wages of some or all agricultural labourers can be raised without causing distress so great as to outweigh the gain to the wage-earners. Clearly this question involves us in problems of extreme difficulty. It becomes necessary to estimate, on the one hand, the gain, and, on the other hand, the loss which will probably result from changes of various degrees of magnitude. To be of practical value, moreover, such an estimate should be made with allowances for the cost and effects of any possible measures which may suggest themselves for the alleviation of distress produced by the increase in wages. In fact, the rivulets of the rural problem become merged in the boundless sea of general national policy. This is necessarily the case so soon as State action is contemplated. For it is impossible to justify the expenditure of national energy or national resources merely by proving that the net results of such expenditure, considered in isolation, are good. To justify the expenditure,

you must show that the results are the *best* which could be obtained at the cost in any sphere of national life to which the energy and resources to be spent might conceivably be applied.

Returning to the more immediate concerns of the inquiry before us, the chief difficulty in weighing loss and gain, with the object of reaching a practical conclusion, lies in the problem of balancing the distress of one set of persons against the increased welfare of others. In the case of an individual, whose lot has undergone change, it is comparatively easy to determine whether the net result of the change has been an increase in satisfaction or the reverse. But if a rise in agricultural wages drives some labourers out of employment and some land out of cultivation, how shall we estimate the change? What amount of distress to how many unemployed persons, and how great a loss of income to landlords, can be equated with how much gain to how many labourers still in employment? At first sight such problems seem insoluble, and inquiry appears of no avail. But a stronger force than doubt overwhelms scepticism of this kind. Necessity compels decision in practical matters. Those who decide to do nothing have already made their choice.¹

¹ The student of an abstract science like economics requires to be always on his guard against the temptation to shrink from decision. He can never hope to measure precisely the force of the tendencies which he exposes to view, but his reasoning may none the less establish a rough probability which is quite sufficient basis for prudent action, and is in fact the only basis such action ever has. In practical life men are constantly making decisions quite as difficult as those which appal the economist when he is faced by a practical issue. Just before writing the sentences above, I happened to be in a hay-field where the grass was being cut. The mowing machine was defective in a way which could not be remedied, and would only cut the top grass if "set low," it would not cut properly at all. The question arose whether it would be best to continue using this machine and leave the short grass uncut or to fetch another machine which would need some preliminary repairs at

In the preceding paragraphs an attempt has been made to indicate the general bearing of the problems considered in the subsequent discussion. It seemed well at the outset to make a general survey of the chief questions involved and to point out some of the difficulties of the inquiry. But the following chapters do not pretend to deal with every aspect of the problem, and I have not attempted to consider in detail all the topics touched upon in this preliminary statement. For instance, the difficult question whether a greater rise in wages is possible on certain grades of agricultural labour than on others is a question which I have left on one side in the inquiries which follow. At the same time those inquiries have been planned so that they follow, in the main, the order in which the problems have been set out in the preliminary survey. The economic condition and possibilities of English agricultural labour in general are first considered, and then I pass on to the special circumstances of particular districts, while the last chapter deals with a topic the consideration of which is generally felt

the blacksmith's. It seemed impossible to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of either course with accuracy—on the one hand, the saving of time and the increased feed that would be left in the field if the first machine was retained and the top-grass only was cut; on the other, the increased hay-crop, if the grass was cut short. The difficulty of decision was increased by (i.) the uncertainty whether the second machine would work any better than the first; (ii) the character of the ground, which raised a doubt whether the first machine would prove equally unmanageable in other parts of the field than that where mowing started; and (iii.) the threatening weather, which complicated the problem of estimating the importance of a loss of time. Yet the men at work decided in favour of the new machine in a very few minutes. And indeed—returning to the question of political action—it is clear that decisions as difficult as those mentioned in the text must necessarily be made by statesmen nearly every day. Both the difficulty of balancing the gain of some individuals against the loss of others, and that of selecting the best out of countless methods of spending money for the public good, must be faced whenever any public expenditure is made and the money raised by taxation.

to be all-important for the balancing of loss and gain by minimum wage regulation—the question of the tendency of such regulation to produce unemployment and the possibility of counteracting it. I am well aware that this plan is open to many objections, and that the problems might have been set out in a more logical and scientific manner. But it would have been difficult to arrange the discussion on a thoroughly scientific plan without throwing it under the domination of highly technical economic conceptions, and my aim has been, in regard to each branch of the problem, to open the argument from the point of view, not of the professional student of economics, but of the layman interested in social welfare. The preliminary survey, at all events, will have served its purpose if it has revealed the implications of the chief questions which suggest themselves to the layman in relation to the general problem of rural labour, if it supplies a series of connecting links between the different branches of the inquiry, and if, by setting out the problem as a whole, however roughly, it makes the incompleteness of the following discussion more apparent and therefore less deceptive.

CHAPTER II

ENGLISH AGRICULTURAL WAGES IN GENERAL

WITH regard to English agricultural wages in general and the possibility of a rise in the wages of all farm labourers, two questions demand consideration. Firstly, are there any reasons for supposing that the existing employers of agricultural labour could afford to pay higher wages all round? Secondly, are there any reasons for supposing that the agricultural industry could afford higher wages to all labourers engaged in it if more efficient agriculturalists were substituted for the present farmers? Practically these questions resolve themselves into others. We must ask whether the dearest labour in agriculture is cheaper to the employer than the dearest labour in other industries, or, in other words, whether the farm labourers who receive in wages the largest proportion of the value of the product of their labour receive a smaller proportion of it than those whose labour is similarly "dearest" in other spheres of employment. This question is really fundamental. For if it pays an employer in any industry to employ labour which is dearer to him than the dearest agricultural labour is to the farmer who employs it, clearly the dearest labour in agriculture might be made still dearer by

a rise in wages without its employment ceasing to be profitable to the farmer. And if it would pay the farmer to employ labour dearer than that which is dearest at the existing rates of wages, *a fortiori* it would still be profitable after a general rise in wages to employ the labour which is now less dear. In fact, a general rise in agricultural wages would be possible and need not produce unemployment. Either the existing farmers or others would be able to afford a rise in wages to all agricultural labourers.

Unfortunately, like so many fundamental questions, the question upon which these conclusions depend is by no means easy to answer. We cannot make a general survey of the world of industry, isolating the dearest labour in each trade, and measuring its "deariness," in order that we may compare it arithmetically with the dearest labour in agriculture. And in this chapter all that I shall attempt is an examination of the general conditions under which agricultural wage-earners sell their labour, and of the expectations of profit which obtain in the agricultural industry. But if this examination reveals forces which tend to make agricultural labour peculiarly cheap to the employer, and if the position of the farmer in regard to profits does not appear to be irreconcilable with the hypothesis that his labour force is in general cheaply obtained, then it will be hard to avoid the conclusion that all farm labourers might receive higher wages, or, in other words, that a general rise in agricultural wages need not produce unemployment. For unless definite evidence to the contrary is forthcoming, the establishment of the fact that agricultural labour in general is peculiarly cheap to the employer will

create a presumption that the dearest labour in agriculture is cheaper than the dearest labour in other trades.

There are obviously two factors upon which the relative cheapness or dearness of labour in any trade depends. These are the bargaining power of the labourers and their mobility in flight to other spheres of employment; and each of these factors must be separately considered in relation to English agriculture.

(a) That farm labourers are deficient in bargaining power will hardly be disputed. Nor is this conclusion a mere deduction from the fact that there is no strong trade union of agricultural labourers actually in existence. Such a deduction would be, perhaps, unjustifiable, for it might be argued that trade unionism was weak in agriculture because there was no need for it, or no possibility of improvement in the attainment of which it was likely to prove a useful instrument.¹ It is important to notice that,

¹ Yet it is well to keep in view the actual condition of agricultural trade unionism. The facts are hard to isolate, because the figures published in the Annual Abstracts of Labour Statistics of the United Kingdom generally lump together the unions of Agricultural Labourers and Fishermen, and where they give statistics for a series of years appear to give the membership of those unions only for which information was attainable for the whole period. It is, however, quite clear (1) that agricultural trade unionism has never been really strong, and (2.) that it has experienced most rapid and startling fluctuations. It was under Mr. Joseph Arch that agricultural trade unionism attained its greatest proportions. In 1874 the National Union had 86,214 members, but in 1875 the number had sunk to 58,652, and by 1881 it was only about 15,000 (*vide* W. Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, 1908, pp. 287, 295). The membership of this union at the end of each year from 1886 to 1894 is given in the First and Second Abstracts of Labour Statistics (*vide* C. 7565, pp. 10-11; C. 7900, p. 13). The figures are 10,366 (1886), 5300 (1887), 4660 (1888), 4254 (1889), 8500 (1890), 15,000 (1891), 15,000 (1892), 14,746 (1893), 1100 (1894). From the Tenth Abstract (*vide* Cd. 2491, pp. 130-131) we find that the membership of unions of Agricultural Labourers and Fishermen together (for which figures were available for the whole period 1892-1903) amounted, at the end of each

however great a need there might be for collective bargaining, the organisation of agricultural labourers would present almost insuperable practical difficulties. In spite of modern improvements in communication, there is still truth in Adam Smith's remark that "the inhabitants of the country, dispersed in distant places, cannot easily combine together." The low wages, which, on the face of things, suggest a need for trade unionism, actually hinder its development, for the farm labourer cannot readily afford to subscribe to a union. A subscription which a collier or an engineer would feel it well worth his while to make might involve an intolerable sacrifice for the agricultural labourer. Besides, in proportion to benefits, the subscription to an Agricultural Labourers' Union—at least while such a union is being built up—is almost bound to be greater than the subscription to a union of urban labourers. Propaganda work is only possible by means of many small meetings, and this fact makes it especi-

year, to 36,986 in 1892, 32,876 in 1894, 8425 in 1894, and only 3922 in 1895, while in no subsequent year down to 1903 did the members of the group of unions reach 5000. The Fourteenth Abstract (*vide* Cd 5458, pp 176-177) gives some more recent figures for unions of Agricultural Labourers and Fishermen: 4094 (1903), 3958 (1905), 4051 (1906), 8348 (1907), 9506 (1908), 7164 (1909). It is true that at the present time the Agricultural Labourers' and Rural Workers' Union has branches in at least sixteen counties, and I am informed by its officials that it is now (Oct. 1913) "enrolling members at the rate of 1000 per month." But none the less the General Secretary (Mr George Edwards) has expressed the opinion "that the labourers cannot get a living wage by Trade Union effort alone," and that "the difficulties of organisation are so great that we cannot get an organisation strong enough to enforce it" [*vide Report of the Land Enquiry* (1913), vol. 1. p. 42]. The weakness of trade unionism in agriculture can only be realised by comparison with other industries. The annual average number of miners and quarrymen who were members of unions in the United Kingdom in the period 1899-1903 seems to have been well over half a million (*vide Work and Wages*, by S. J. Chapman, Part II. (1908) p. 138). But in 1901 miners and quarrymen only amounted to 5 per cent of the total number of occupied persons in the United Kingdom, while 12.66 per cent of this total were occupied in agriculture.

ally costly.¹ Again, not only does this mean that it costs more in the time, wages, and travelling expenses of officials to get in touch with farm labourers than it does to get in touch with workers in towns, but it is probable that a smaller proportion of the audience are willing to join the union after a small meeting than after a large one. A large crowd is easily stirred by oratory; but there is no less responsive audience than the heterogeneous and straggling company which meets on a village green. Such an assembly gives no sense of strength or security to the individuals who compose it. The circumstances of the meeting make the act of joining the union appear not so much like joining hands with a large host of fellow-workers who will stand by one another, as like an eccentric individual action, which will certainly be talked about in the village, and may be reported to the individual's employer. Again, starting a new trade union in a town to-day means starting it where trade unionism, in other forms, is probably already well known. Joining a union is not a particularly unconventional thing in a town: it does not mark a man as the foe of his employer. But in the country trade unionism is a strange alien. The farmers mostly view it with Early Victorian eyes. The labourers can learn nothing of it from neighbours who are already members of a union: their knowledge is limited to the memory of former rural unions which have failed, to the accounts of trade unionism in the halfpenny press, and to the only

¹ Mr. Coe, the able lieutenant of Mr. George Edwards in the task of organising rural labour, once remarked to me that, whereas it was possible to get four thousand men to a single meeting in a town, it would cost him two years' campaigning merely to get the ear of so many farm labourers.

half-believed information imparted in a speech which a stranger makes to them as a prelude to asking for money.¹ Yet another hindrance to the development of a strong trade union of farm labourers may perhaps be found in the fact that there is so little in agricultural work to teach the need of combination. Men are often quite alone at their work for hours or even for days, and they never join together in large bands for a common task. Mr. Seebohm Rowntree quotes a Yorkshire farm labourer who, when asked why the men did not form a union, remarked, "There's no two that's alike. Ivery one on 'em gets fixed in his own orkard way."² There is a good deal to be said, too, for the opinion that the authoritarian traditions of the older village life make against trade unionism. This is especially the case where there is a resident squire who may employ the sons of farm labourers in his garden or about his stables.³ It is true that

¹ The writer has a vivid recollection of acting as chairman at a propagandist meeting of the Agricultural Labourers' Union held in an Oxfordshire village so recently as the summer of 1912. The questions which were asked after the meeting had a cynical reference to the failure of Mr. Arch's schemes and of the unionist movement of the early 'nineties, to some story of embezzlement by one of the officials of a former union, and to the "good living" made out of his calling by the trade union official who addressed the meeting. The curate of the village made a statement at the meeting to the effect that no one need fear victimisation by his employer for joining the union, for he had talked with all the farmers in the place and they had no objection to their men belonging to the union. This statement was greeted with cries of "They may tell you so." Not long after this meeting, one of the farmers called the attention of one of the most talkative men in the place to a newspaper account of police court proceedings against an official of some trade union for dishonest practices in connection with the funds of that union. All this took place in a village which has no resident squire and is notorious for its political radicalism.

² Vide B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the Labourer Lives* (1913), p. 191.

³ I shall perhaps be forgiven for pointing out—though the fact is obvious enough—that to assert that labourers fear the disapproval of the squire, if they join a union, is not necessarily to accuse the squire of intolerance. It may be only to accuse the labourers of ignorance.

the young unmarried farm labourers, being fit and venturesome and "without encumbrances," have more pocket money than their fathers and do not dread dismissal, so that they are not likely to be prevented from joining a union either by timidity or by lack of cash. But these men, or at least the more enterprising of them, have it in their minds either to leave agriculture altogether for some more remunerative employment or to emigrate. Their hope is not to improve the lot of British farm labourers, but to leave their company.¹

Enough has been said to show the lack of organisation and bargaining power among agricultural labourers, and few economists will to-day dispute the contention that such a deficiency must tend to cheapen agricultural labour. This contention is obviously not affected by a case like that of the printing trade, where wages have risen less than the average, though the trade is highly organised. In the first place, it is not a question of wages but of the cheapness or dearness of labour measured in relation to its product. Secondly, the failure of organisation to effect a rapid rise of wages in certain isolated cases does not disprove the truth of the opinion that organisation generally makes for higher wages. And with regard to wage move-

¹ In discussing these obstacles to trade unionism, I have not mentioned the "farm tied" cottage. Though it acts as a hindrance to unionism by putting the more skilled labourers, who might otherwise be expected to lead their fellows, under the fear of eviction as well as dismissal, it is more especially as a hindrance to *mobility* that it deserves notice. I may, however, point out that its influence is considerable even where the system is not widespread, for the more skilled men (*e.g.* cattlemen, carters, and shepherds) are the most usual occupiers of tied cottages. Cp. Wilson Fox, *Report on Wages and Earnings of Agricultural Labourers, 1900* (Cd. 346), pp. 22-23. See also the evidence of Mr. George Edwards quoted in the *Report of the Land Enquiry*, vol. 1 (1913) p. 146.

ments in general during the half-century 1848-1907, it may be pointed out (1) that "wages have risen less rapidly than the average in agriculture," and (2) that in the iron and steel and mining industries where "wages . . . have risen, especially during the latter quarter of the (nineteenth) century, at a considerably more rapid rate than the average," it appears "the threat of a strike is a more potent weapon than in some other cases," and "the general conditions of these trades have in fact thrown the advantage in bargaining on to the side of the workmen."¹

In general, some weighty sentences of Dr. Marshall's are to the point. "The want of reserve funds," he writes, "and of the power of long withholding their labour from the market is common to nearly all grades of those whose work is chiefly with their hands. But it is especially true of unskilled labourers, partly because their wages leave very little margin for saving, partly because when any group of them suspends work, there are large numbers who are capable of filling their places. And . . . it is more difficult for them than for skilled artisans to form themselves into strong and lasting combinations; and so to put themselves on something like terms of equality in bargaining with their employers." He adds: "The effects of the labourer's disadvantage in bargaining are . . . cumulative in two ways. It lowers his wages, and . . . this lowers his efficiency as a worker, and thereby lowers the normal value of his labour. And in addition it diminishes his efficiency as a bargainer, and thus

¹ *Vide* F. W. Hirst, *Porter's Progress of the Nation* (1912), pp. 51-52.

increases the chance that he will sell his labour for less than its normal value.”¹

(b) It is now necessary to turn to another side of the problem, and to consider the mobility of agricultural labourers—that is to say, the facility with which they emigrate or find other employment, for I am not at present concerned with the mobility of agricultural *labour* between different parts of the country, but with the mobility of agricultural *labourers* between English agriculture and other occupations.

It may very well be argued that, though our farm labourers are unorganised and deficient in bargaining power, the “rural exodus” has more than counteracted this weakness. It may be contended, in other words, that the depletion of the ranks of agricultural labour indicates extreme mobility in flight to more remunerative or otherwise more attractive occupations, that this mobility explains the rise in agricultural wages which has in fact taken place, and that it would have brought about a still greater improvement if this had been economically possible. The implication of this argument clearly is that agricultural labour is not

¹ *Vide* Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, vol. i. (5th edition, 1907) pp. 568-569. The conclusion that the weakness of trade unionism in agriculture cheapens agricultural labour need not be rejected by those who look upon trade unionism in general with disfavour and deny its usefulness as an agent for raising wages throughout industry. For it may be argued that even if a world of “free labour” would be a better world for wage-earners to live in, the workers in an unorganised trade may none the less be penalised for their lack of organisation *when labour in other trades is organised*. Just as a man may believe in general disarmament and yet hold that it would be dangerous for a particular nation to disarm itself in an armed world, and just as one may believe in “universal free trade” while denying the advantages of “one-sided free trade,” so it would not be in the least inconsistent to hold (i.) that wages would be higher in general if there were no trade unions, and (ii.) that where trade unions are common the absence of a union does tend to keep wages low in a particular trade.

peculiarly cheap to the employer, and that there is no reason for supposing that agriculture could, any more than any other industry, afford a further rise in wages.

This argument deserves careful examination, and in its criticism it will be necessary to keep in view four facts of recent history—the achieved increase in agricultural wages, the changes in prices which have reduced the intensity of British tillage and brought about the conversion of arable land, the introduction of labour-saving machinery, and the decline in the number of agricultural labourers.¹

In the first place, it is all-important to notice that the rise in agricultural wages which has taken place in England need not necessarily mean that agricultural labour is any dearer to the employer than it was. The labourer's work may be worth more now than formerly, and wages, though higher, may not represent a larger proportion of the value of the workman's product than the lower wages of the past. On the face of things, the decline in the number of men employed may be the result of a decline in the demand for agricultural labour. And this decline, induced by the fall in the price of produce and the introduction of machinery, may

¹ I have written advisedly "the decline in the number of agricultural labourers" and not "the number of agricultural labourers who have left the land or emigrated." If there had been no change in British agriculture—no fall in prices, no supersession of men by machines, no decline in the demand for agricultural labour—many would still have left, and indeed have been obliged to leave, the villages, and that for the obvious reasons that the rural population has not ceased to increase and multiply, and that the supply of good land in England is limited. Of those thus driven out many would be, no doubt rightly, regarded as farm labourers, for many work on the land for a year or two in youth before leaving their home. But there need have been no decline in the number of farm labourers. My excuse for calling attention to these obvious points is that many people seem to imagine that a "rural exodus" necessarily involves rural depopulation.

have gone further than these changes required. The need for alteration in methods must have led farmers to rely less than before upon tradition in estimating the intensity of cultivation to be practised and the number of men to be employed on a given area of land. But possibly this shock to tradition induced the opinion that it would be advisable to restrict operations even more than was proportionate to the fall in prices. If so, operations as profitable under the new market conditions as were some of those which were undertaken under the old conditions may have been abandoned, with the result that labour has been concentrated upon the more remunerative tasks. Hence, notwithstanding the fall in prices, the least remunerative tasks performed in English agriculture to-day may be more remunerative than some tasks that were previously undertaken. And the rise in wages may thus mean that the work done is more valuable, and not that the labour is more dearly bought. But if this hypothesis is correct, the employer's power of increasing wages has not been diminished. If an increase of wages was possible under the old conditions, an increase must be possible now.¹

Secondly, even if the hypothesis of the preceding paragraph is not a true explanation of the rise in agricultural wages, and if that rise has made labour dearer to the farmer, it does not follow that a further

¹ In technical language, the suggestion of the above paragraph amounts to this—that the rise in agricultural wages may simply represent an increase in the "marginal net product" of agricultural labour. The advent of machinery is a fact which adds plausibility to this hypothesis. Machinery cannot be substituted for those tasks for which labour is indispensable; and the residuum of tasks left to human hands after the introduction of agricultural machinery are surely tasks of high productivity, and tasks which require judgment, care, and knowledge of machines.

rise of wages is impossible. Agricultural labour may still be cheaper than the labour of other trades. The emigration of labourers from the country districts, though it may have caused the rise of wages, need not have exercised a force sufficiently great to counterbalance the weakness of farm labourers in bargaining. The general question whether the migration of farm labourers has in fact tended to strengthen the position of those that remain on the land, and to assure them a price for their labour proportionate to that obtained in other industries, can only be answered after a careful inquiry into the causes and character of the migration. The argument depends really on the assumptions that the flight of rural labourers to the town indicates great mobility in recourse to superior labour markets, and that this mobility would necessarily produce a scarcity of agricultural labour, and so force agricultural employers to pay, in proportion to the workman's product, as high wages as are paid in the competing spheres of employment. But though it may no doubt be granted that the readiness and ability of workmen to get other employment is a factor which does tend to make wages "find their own level," the more one examines the conditions of rural England, the less possible it becomes to believe that this readiness and ability is an influential cause of rural migration, and the conclusion is forced upon one that farm labourers, instead of being peculiarly mobile, are among the least mobile of all wage-earners. There is no question about the fact that farm labourers do move to other trades in enormous numbers. But the argument under criticism assumes that they

move readily, that a slight prospect of gain is sufficient to draw off so many to other trades that scarcity of agricultural labour results, and that a readjustment of wages in the interest of the labourer is thus brought about by the force of competition. These are the contentions which I dispute.

It is easy to be deceived by the magnitude of the rural exodus. But it must be remembered, in the first place, that crowds of men would have left the villages even if there had been no decline in the supply of agricultural labour. The natural increase of population would in any case have compelled many to seek urban employment; and it is clear that some migration would even be compatible with an increase in the number of farm labourers. Secondly, though the number of farm labourers has in fact declined to an enormous extent, it is also true that the demand for their labour has declined. But the argument under consideration depends on the hypothesis that agricultural labour has become *scarce*—that is to say, that the supply of such labour is smaller in relation to the reduced demand than it was formerly in relation to the greater demand of the days when corn prices were very high and agricultural machinery only slightly developed. This hypothesis, I venture to think, can hardly be maintained. At all events, I hold that if there is any scarcity of agricultural labour to-day, it has not been sufficient to remedy deficiencies of bargaining power.

The questions which lie at the root of the problem can be put, if they cannot be answered, in a word. Has the decline in the demand for

agricultural labour kept pace with the diminution of its supply, or has the rural exodus had the effect of making such labour scarce? Secondly, does the decline in the number of farm labourers really mean that they have been enticed away by the higher wages of the towns—that they are, in fact, extremely mobile,—or is it merely a result of the decline in the demand for their labour? Have they been enticed away or driven out?

As regards the first point, there is a good deal of evidence which suggests that, at least until very recent years, an equilibrium has been maintained between the demand and supply of agricultural labour. Mr. William C. Little, in his Report on the Agricultural Labourer made to the Royal Commission on Labour in 1894, says: "It would appear that very generally throughout the country the supply is fully equal to the present demand for labour, at any but the busiest times of the year."¹ Mr. R. H. Rew, speaking of the period 1881–1901, argues that "the demand for farm labour has been restricted as the supply has declined, and that something like an equilibrium has been so far

¹ *Vide* C 7421, pp. 204–205. This opinion seems to have been pretty generally shared by the Assistant Commissioners who reported on different districts. Even Mr. Chapman, who reported that "there is general complaint amongst farmers that the supply of labour is short," and that "skilled labour is generally scarce," also asserted that "of ordinary labour the supply is about equal to the demand" (*vide* C 6894, II pp 15–16). Mr. R. C. Richards wrote that "in all the districts alike there has been a decrease in the supply of labour, though it is not quite clear that this decrease has exceeded the decrease in demand" (*vide* C. 6894, iv. p 6). Mr. Wilson Fox said: "The supply of labour in all the five unions, with the exception of some parts of Gendale, is described by employers as sufficient" (*vide* C. 6894, III p. 8). Mr. E. Wilkinson wrote: "Speaking generally, I should say that the supply and demand are fairly balanced" (*vide* C 6894, vi. p 11). Mr A. J. Spencer also wrote: "The decrease in supply and decrease in demand have, in fact, proceeded concurrently and have pretty well balanced one another" (*vide* C. 6894, v. p 6).

maintained.”¹ It is true that in another place he asserts that “alongside the influences affecting demand, and more than keeping pace with them, has been the increasing desire of the labourers to leave the land.”² But he is quite clear as to the magnitude of the decline in the demand for agricultural labour. “The loss of 2,000,000 acres of arable land in Great Britain in the twenty years 1881-1901,” he writes, “probably threw out of work from 60,000 to 80,000 labourers at least during that period.”³ Nor was this, in Mr. Rew’s opinion, the most important factor making for the diminution of demand. He says that “while manual labour has no doubt been economised to some extent by curtailing some of the operations which require it, the main cause of its reduction is undoubtedly the extended use of labour-saving machinery,” and again that “the displacement of manual labour arising from the greatly extended use of drills, horse-hoes, mowers, binders, manure distributors and the like must have been in the aggregate very great,” and that “probably to this more than to any other single cause the reduced demand for farm labourers may be attributed.”⁴

It will be said that these opinions do not refer to recent years. They do, however, refer to the condition of the rural labour market up to the end of the period when the decline in the number of farm labourers was proceeding rapidly. The Census for 1911 shows that the population of the rural districts of England and Wales increased in

¹ *Vide Report on the Decline in the Agricultural Population of Great Britain, 1881-1906* (Cd. 3273), p. 11.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 15.

³ *Vide ibid.* p. 11.

⁴ *Vide ibid.* p. 14.

the decade 1901-1911, whereas each preceding Census since 1861 had exhibited a decrease.¹ Moreover, the number of farm labourers in England and Wales was greater in 1911 than in 1901.² During the decade, too, there was a decrease of 661,000 acres in the arable area in England alone.³ If, then, the migration did not produce an influential scarcity of agricultural labour before 1901, it can hardly be supposed to have done so in the next ten years.

There remains, however, the further question as to the psychology, so to say, of the migration. Did the emigrants go as exiles or as adventurers? This question is really less pertinent to the inquiry, and is certainly harder to answer, than the question whether the demand for labour has declined in proportion to the decrease in its supply. Opinions differ on the point. Mr. William C. Little maintained that "the reduction of the working staff on farms was the consequence, and not the cause, of migration."⁴ But a more recent authority, Dr. Hasbach, holds that among the causes driving the labourer to the towns and the

¹ *Vide Census of England and Wales, 1911*, vol. i. (Cd. 6258) p. xvi.

² The numbers of male farm bailiffs, foremen, shepherds, and agricultural labourers of all kinds in England and Wales were 631,728 in 1901 and 665,258 in 1911. Farmers, graziers, and their relatives who assisted in the work of the farm numbered 291,916 in 1901 and 306,450 in 1911. *Vide Census of England and Wales, 1901* (Cd. 1523), p. 190, and *ibid.*, 1911 (Cd. 7019), p. 3. It is true that the Board of Agriculture Report on Migration from Rural Districts, which is dated November 1913, says "there is a general consensus of opinion . . . that the supply of labour is deficient," but "in many cases," we read, "it may be surmised that reference is made to the number who might be employed if the old conditions still existed, and not to the actual number who could now find regular employment on the farms as at present cultivated" (*vide* pp. 2-3).

³ *Vide Agricultural Statistics, 1911*, vol. xlvi. part 1. (Cd. 6021) pp. 7-8.

⁴ *Vide General Report on the Agricultural Labourer to the Commission on Labour. 1802* vol. v part 1 (C. 6804. xxv.) p. 40.

emigrant ship "the first and most important was lack of employment,"¹ while in another paragraph he says: "The theory that the agricultural population in general was unconquerably attracted by the towns cannot be seriously maintained."² The common opinion as to the attraction of the town for the villager has also been challenged by one who probably understands the mind of the south-country rustic better than any other living person. Mr. Thomas Hardy says of the rural cottagers generally: "That these people have removed to the towns of sheer choice during the last forty years it would be absurd to say, except as to that percentage of young, adventurous, and ambitious spirits among them which is found in all societies."³ This was written in 1902. In 1883 he had spoken still more strongly, asserting that "this process, which is designated by statisticians as 'the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns,' is really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced."⁴

It appears then that a considerable body of expert opinion can be quoted against the theory that the extreme mobility of the agricultural labourers has remedied their lack of bargaining power; and it is now necessary to inquire whether the authority of the witnesses I have cited can be supported by argument.

By the nature of things it is impossible to bring the question to a statistical test. The introduction

¹ *Vide* W. Hasbach, *A History of the English Agricultural Labourer*, translated by R. Kenyon, 1908, p. 343.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 344.

³ Quoted by Sir Rider Haggard, *Rural England* (1902), vol. i. p. 284, and in the *Report of the Land Enquiry*, vol. 1 p. 150.

⁴ *Vide* Haggard, *ibid.* vol. 1. pp. 285-286.

of machinery is a factor which cannot be measured precisely, and this prohibits any satisfactory estimate of the decline in the demand for agricultural labour, such as otherwise might be attainable on the basis of calculations from the prices of farm products, from the records of crops, and from the acreage under cultivation of one sort or another at each period. It is not, however, impertinent to notice that the decline in the number of men employed on the land has only been in a loose sense synchronous with the rise in agricultural wages. The curves of the two movements do not really correspond. If we take the table compiled by Wilson Fox to show the percentage fluctuations in the weekly cash wages of ordinary agricultural labourers in England and Wales as compared with the wages of 1893 as a standard year, and if we take a three years' average of percentages in this table at the beginning of each decade and compare the figures thus obtained with the numbers of farm labourers enumerated at each Census, we get the following results :¹

	Three years' average of wages compared with 1893 as a standard year	Number of male farm labourers in England and Wales at each Census
1850-1852	69 8	1,110,311 . . 1851
1860-1862	83 7	1,098,261 . . 1861
1870-1872	92 3	923,332 . . 1871
1880-1882	99 2	830,452 . . 1881
1890-1892	99 7	756,557 . . 1891

Now, these figures show that the decade which

¹ *Vide Report on Wages and Earnings of Agricultural Labourers, 1900* (Cd. 346), p. 49; F. G. Heath, *British Rural Life and Labour* (1911), pp. 158-159. Probably these figures of population need to be corrected in some particulars.

saw the greatest increase in wages (1851-1861) saw a decrease in the number of agricultural labourers enormously *less* than that occurring in each of the other decades. Again, if we take a table in Sir George Askwith's Report which is based on returns from 156 farms in England and Wales—whereas Wilson Fox's table is only based on returns from 33 farms—we find that the cash wages of ordinary labourers actually declined between 1880 and 1890. Expressed in percentages of the year 1900 (taken as 100) this decline was from 92.6 to 91.4.¹ A decline in the money wages of agriculture in general in the *United Kingdom* is also asserted by Mr. Bowley to have taken place during this decade, and he, measuring the movement by 1891 as a standard year, estimates the decline as from 104 to 100.² On the other hand, the cash weekly wages of ordinary farm labourers in England and Wales rose between 1890 and 1900 as from 91.4 to 100, and this period saw a reduction in numbers of nearly 20 per cent.³ Since 1900 the decline in the number of agricultural labourers in England and Wales has in general been checked, and it appears that, while their money wages rose between 1900 and 1912 as from 100 to 104.9, the cost of living has increased in a much greater ratio.⁴

¹ *Vide Report on Earnings and Hours of Labour, Agriculture in 1907* (Cd. 5460), p. xv.

² *Vide A. L. Bowley, Wages in the United Kingdom* (1900), p. 130. According to F. G. Heath (*op. cit.* pp. 158-160), there were 1,232,618 farm labourers in the United Kingdom in 1881, and 1,110,069 in 1891.

³ *Vide* Cd. 5460, p. xv.; F. G. Heath, *op. cit.* pp. 158-159.

⁴ *Vide supra*, p. 27, and *Report of Land Enquiry*, vol. 1, pp. 9 and 11, which quotes figures from the *Abstract of Labour Statistics, 1912* (Cd. 6228), p. 76, from an answer given in the House of Commons by the Parliamentary Secretary of the Board of Trade, June 24, 1913, and from Blue Books which refer to the cost of living (Cd. 6955, p. 299, and Cd. 1761, p. 210).

As the statistical evidence yields no definite conclusion, it remains to consider the alleged mobility of the farm labourer on more general grounds. And in the first place it should be noticed that the very fact that farm labourers receive low wages creates a presumption that their mobility is inadequate. "Perfect competition," writes Dr. Marshall, "requires a perfect knowledge of the state of the market; and though no great departure from the actual facts of life is involved in assuming this knowledge on the part of dealers when we are considering the course of business in Lombard Street, the Stock Exchange, or in a wholesale Produce Market; it would be an altogether unreasonable assumption to make when we are examining the causes that govern the supply of labour in any of the lower grades of industry. For if a man had sufficient ability to know everything about the market for his labour, he would have too much to remain long in a low grade."¹ The poverty of the farm labourer, then, probably implies ignorance of market conditions, though it is of course true that, on the principle "*Omne ignotum pro magnifico*," this ignorance might result in an exaggerated notion of the advantages of urban employment. It is clear that poverty makes the cost of transition to such employment a greater obstacle than it otherwise would be.

Secondly, for the rural labourer the actual expense of transition to a new occupation is necessarily greater than it usually is for the labourer in a town. The man in a town can often change his occupation without shifting his home: a bricklayer's labourer

¹ *Vide* Marshall, *op. cit.* pp. 539-540.

in London or Liverpool can become a dock-labourer, or a worker at the gasworks can become a drayman, without moving his household and furniture. But the rural labourer must almost necessarily go elsewhere for new employment. And in the case of the agricultural labourer the farm-tied cottage often proves a special obstacle to mobility. As an agricultural labourer once remarked to me, "The worst of working for a farmer is, that if you leave your job, you lose your home." The farm-tied cottage even hinders mobility between different occupations within the village: unless a cottage happens to be vacant at the same time as a job—say a platelayer's—the man in the farm-tied cottage dare not apply for that job.¹ Again, the labourer who lives in one of these cottages cannot go off to a town and leave his family in the country, where living is cheap, until he has got a satisfactory position, for the farmer will immediately want the cottage for the labourer's successor. And it deserves notice that, as the farm-tied cottages are usually given to the best paid and most skilled men, this obstacle hinders more especially the very men who, on account of their greater knowledge and enterprise and their more substantial wages, might otherwise be expected to prove the most mobile of their class.

Thirdly, paradoxical though it may seem, the "rural exodus" tends to make the farm labourer less mobile than he otherwise would be. Though

¹ Sometimes, it seems, even the sons of a labourer who live in a tied house are hindered from taking employment in the village under any other than their father's master. Some striking examples of this restriction on the mobility of labour are given in the *Report of the Land Enquiry*, vol. i. (1913) pp. 143-144.

something must no doubt be allowed for the establishment of a fashion of migration, and though the tramp of the exiled may to some extent make the road to the town, as it were, smoother for others, the fact remains that necessary migration in flight from unemployment absorbs those whose age and temperament make them most willing to leave the village; and the call of ambition, which must be obeyed by many over and above those squeezed out, if scarcity of labour is to raise wages, is thus addressed to a population already denuded of all its most ambitious and venturesome spirits. As Professor Pigou observes: "It should . . . be noted that, as a trade or place decays and the young men gradually leave, the relevant costs of movement gradually rise, because the age distribution of the population is modified."¹ And certainly the age distribution of farm labourers is remarkable. At the close of the period which witnessed the decline in their number, their ranks exhibited an unusually small proportion of men between 20 and 25, which should be the most mobile age, since men are at that age not only physically strong and enterprising, but are mostly still unmarried. According to the Census of 1901, of the total occupied males in England and Wales 14.11 per cent were between 20 and 25 years of age, but of the total number of farm labourers of all classes (excluding farm bailiffs and foremen) only 11.43 per cent came within this age-group. And though the deficiency in this particular age-group has been made good since 1901, the Census for 1911 shows that the percentage of farm labourers who are of compara-

¹ *Vide* A. C. Pigou, *Wealth and Welfare* (1912), p. 112.

tively "immobile" ages is still unusually large. In 1911 no less than 31.12 per cent of the total number of male farm labourers were over 45 years old, while 7.82 per cent of them were under 16. For occupied males of all classes the corresponding figures were 26.75 per cent and 5.22 per cent.¹ These facts seem to indicate that the ranks of agricultural labour contain an unusually large proportion both of individuals whose youth must tend to delay their inevitable departure from rural work, and of men of an age at which willingness to migrate and ability to secure fresh employment must be at a minimum.

That the causes indicated by these considerations, or some other causes, have in fact prevented farm labourers from being adequately mobile seems to me to be partially confirmed by two facts.

The first fact is that the rural exodus has not reduced the male population so much as it has reduced the female population of the countryside. It appears from the Census for 1911 that the males formed 47.94 per cent of the population of the urban and 49.97 per cent of that of the rural districts of England and Wales.² Nor can this be explained away by the peculiar conditions of the mining districts, where the ratio of males to females is exceptionally high, and where industrial conditions are found in "villages." The phenomenon is particularly marked in some counties which are usually reckoned especially agricultural. In Norfolk the females outnumber the males in the urban

¹ These figures are calculated from those in Appendix I.

² *Vide Census of England and Wales, 1911*, vol. i. (Cd. 6258) pp. 10, 41. The following figures for different counties are derived from the same volume.

districts by 17,404; but in the rural districts the males exceed the females by 606. In the urban districts of Suffolk females are in a majority of 11,036: in the rural districts they are in a minority of 3728. Among other English counties, where the males preponderate in the rural and the females in the urban districts, may be mentioned Essex, Huntingdon, Kent, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Shropshire, the East Riding of Yorkshire, and Wiltshire. There seems no reason for supposing that this distribution of the sexes is derived from anything unusual in the ratio of male and female births or deaths in the villages. In Wiltshire—to take a county where this type of sex distribution occurs, and where the population of the rural districts largely outnumbers that of the urban districts—it appears from the Census for 1901 that the males formed 49.59 per cent of the persons enumerated in the county, but of the enumerated persons in England and Wales who were stated to have been born in Wiltshire the males were only 48.01 per cent.¹ Some objection may, however, be made to any deduction from this fact, because it may be argued that probably more male than female natives escaped enumeration by emigration to other countries, especially as the Census for 1901 was taken during the South African War. Clearer evidence, perhaps, is provided by some statistics I have procured for a group of agricultural villages in Oxfordshire. In the Bletchington Registrar's sub-district, which forms part of the Bicester Rural District, the Census of 1901

¹ *Vide Census of England and Wales, 1901, Summary Tables* (Cd. 1523), pp. 6, 246.

reveals an excess of females—the figures being 2840 males and 2921 females; and during the ten years 1901 to 1910 (inclusive) there was an excess of female births as well as an excess of male deaths in the district. None the less, in 1911 the Census recorded an excess of males in this district. It is clear, therefore, that the majority of the emigrants from these villages during the decade must have been females. The significance of this fact is all the greater because the Bletchington district has been chosen for examination for the merely accidental reason that it was easy for me to obtain information about it.¹ In general there seems to be ground for believing that, whatever may be the mobility of the farm labourer in leaving the villages, it is not so great as that of the girls and women, who leave the country for domestic service or other employment in the towns.

The second fact which appears to confirm to some extent the deductions which have been made as to the farm labourer's lack of mobility is the fact, already noted in a quotation from Mr. Hirst's edition of Porter's *Progress of the Nation*, that agricultural wages "have risen less rapidly than the average."² If the agricultural labourer had really remedied deficiency in bargaining power by extreme mobility, and if a scarcity of agricultural labour had really brought the cost of labour in agriculture to a level with that of other trades, the upward movement of farm labourers' wages would surely have been at

¹ I am indebted for this information to Mr. G. J. Dew, the Registrar of the Bletchington District. The figures for 1911 are 2880 males and 2788 females. During the period 1901 to 1910 (inclusive) there were 587 male and 593 female births, and 335 male and 324 female deaths.

² *Vide supra*, p. 19.

least as marked as the rise of wages in other trades. To this contention two objections will be made. It will be urged, firstly, that the total income of the labourer may have risen more than his weekly wages, and that any shortening of the hours of labour must be counted as equivalent to an increase of income; and, secondly, that it is not a question of wages, or even of the labourer's total income, but of the cost of labour, and, that this may have risen more than the curve of income would suggest, because the efficiency of the labourers may have declined. But closer inspection makes one doubt the validity of these objections. As regards the relation between weekly wages and the total income, there is no evidence to support the view that payments in kind or extra earnings have increased more than the regular wages, and indeed the evidence suggests the opposite. In Sir George Askwith's Report, issued in 1910, we read that "the system of paying a portion of the wages of agricultural labourers in the form of allowances in kind is declining."¹ As to extra earnings in general, Mr. Bowley, writing in 1899, says: "There seems no reason to suppose that the ratio of earnings to wages has changed to any great extent on the average since Arthur Young's time, and it appears that the former are about 17 per cent higher than the latter."² Wilson Fox, however, calculated that on fourteen farms, for which figures were available, the percentage increase in total earnings in the period from 1851 to 1901 was 51.3, while the

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. x.

² *Vide* A. L. Bowley, "The Statistics of Wages—Part IV. : Agricultural Wages—Earnings and General Averages," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1899, p. 556; quoted by Wilson Fox, *ibid.*, 1903, p. 288.

increase in rates of weekly wages during the same period was 60.8 per cent.¹ With regard to hours of labour, it is obvious that my argument would only be affected if it could be shown that the shortening of hours had been greater in agriculture than in other employments. But this does not seem to have been the case. Mr. J. S. Jeans, writing in 1892, says: "From the character of their employment, it was hardly to be expected that the hours of agricultural labourers should be shortened to the same extent as the hours of labour in manufacturing industry. Nevertheless, there has been a substantial abatement of the hours even of agriculturists during the last thirty years. In Cheshire the average summer hours have since 1860 been reduced from 63 to 59; in Lincolnshire (Lincoln district) from 63 to 60; in East Suffolk from 63 to 59; in Mid Sussex from 57 to 55½; and in North Herefordshire from 59 to 55½. In many other districts the hours of labour have been practically unchanged over the last fifty years."²

There remains the second objection—that the efficiency of farm labourers has declined, and that therefore the moderate advance in income conceals a considerable rise in the cost of labour to the employer. This objection is especially plausible because it may be urged that the rural exodus

¹ *Vide* Wilson Fox, "Agricultural Wages in England and Wales during the last Fifty Years," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1903, p. 287.

² *Vide* J. S. Jeans, "The Recent Movement of Labour," *ibid.*, 1892, p. 626. In the mining industry, Mr Jeans asserts that there was in the period 1850–1890 a reduction of from 14½ to 22 hours a week in parts of England (*vide ibid.* p. 628). It must be remembered that a half-holiday on Saturday or some other week-day has become pretty general in urban employment, but is practically unknown in agriculture except in Lancashire, where it has recently been won by a strike. *Cp. Report of the Land Enquiry Committee*, vol. i. (1913) p. 15.

has taken the best men and that the stock of the rustic population has steadily deteriorated. A good many authorities may be cited in support of this view. "The best, and not the worst, men went," writes Lord Eversley.¹ Speaking of the history of the Labourers' Union in the 'seventies, Mr. Rowland E. Prothero remarks: "It must be remembered that the better class of workmen had left the poorly-paid districts of the South and East, and that employers were asked to pay more money for labour which was inferior in quality and less in result."² Mr. G. H. Fosbroke, Medical Officer of Health to the Worcestershire County Council, in evidence before the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, said, in 1904: "Generally the farmers say that the men are of a weaker type altogether. The more robust men go into the towns,"³

There is, however, much to be said on the other side. The contention that the best men have left the country is, at best, ambiguous. The men most suited to urban employment may have departed, but it does not follow that these were the best men from the farmer's point of view. A man of ambitious, independent, and restless temperament may do well in a town, but the farmer will not find him his most profitable servant. The desire for amusements, so frequently cited as a cause of rural depopulation, can hardly be supposed to appeal more strongly to

¹ *Vide* Lord Eversley, "The Decline in Number of Agricultural Labourers," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1907, p. 293.

² *Vide* R. E. Prothero, *English Farming Past and Present* (1912), p. 410.

³ *Vide* Minutes of Evidence taken before the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration, 1904, Cd. 2210, p. 260, Question 6543.

men of muscle than to those less fit. It might even be argued that those who are good at farm work will, *ceteris paribus*, be happier at it than others. Certainly, in so far as difficulty in retaining regular employment is a cause of men leaving the villages, this is a factor which should select for migration those least suited to agricultural work. It is unfortunate that definite information as to the trades pursued by countrymen after migration does not seem to be forthcoming, but my own impression, formed during a sixteen years' residence in the country, is that railway service is the chief resort of the rustic exile. But railway service hardly requires the same qualities as work on the land. For their uniformed staff, to which the village lad most readily turns, the Railway Companies require smartness, alertness, and a certain measure of clerky skill, such as the farmer loudly condemns for a useless product of wasted education rates. It is hard to believe that men selected for qualities which farmers consider useless, if not harmful, are really the men best fitted for farm work. Again, even if it could be proved that the best farm labourers have left the villages, it would still remain arguable that the inferior men of this generation are equal or even superior to the average men of previous generations. Higher wages, education (whatever the farmers may think of it), increased temperance, better hygienic knowledge, "the universal withdrawal of the women from field work," and the declining birth-rate, are all factors which must have tended towards better breeding, and better nurture, and better feeding.¹

¹ The quotation is from Mr. W. C. Little; *vide* Wilson Fox, *Agricultural Wages*, p. 298. Mr. F. G. Heath points out that there were 143,475 female

It would be surprising if these things had not made the labourer more healthy and more intelligent. The evidence which suggests the contrary is doubtful in itself and has been stoutly challenged. Mr. Fosbroke, whose belief that the rural population had deteriorated has been mentioned above, admitted in his evidence that the country folk were "better housed and better fed" than they had been, and that there was less drunkenness among the agricultural labourers. He stated too that his opinion as to deterioration was not based on any anthropometrical records but on personal impressions, and said that an experienced medical officer of a post office at Worcester "was quite under the impression that there was deterioration, but on going into the whole of his records we found that that was not so, when we took the average heights and weights and chest measurements, and so on."¹ Mr. J. Gray, the Secretary to the Anthropometric Committee of the British Association, when examined before the Committee on Physical Deterioration, was asked whether he thought there was any evidence of deterioration among country-bred people, and he replied: "No, I do not think there is."² Wilson Fox, in 1903, wrote: "The medical authorities I

farm labourers in England and Wales in 1851, but only 11,963 in 1901, *vide op. cit.* p. 160. The Census of 1911, however, gives a total of 13,220, exclusive of bailiffs and "foremen," *vide Cd 7019*, p. 3. As to diet, Wilson Fox said. "In the last 50 years the food of the labourer has increased in quantity in the low-wage districts, and in all districts in quality and variety," *vide op. cit.* p. 291. As regards the birth-rate, *vide Marshall, op. cit.* p. 184.

It will be noticed that in the sentence in the text I have spoken in very general terms. It may, of course, be argued that the labourer to-day spends on newspapers, on his children's dress, or on gramophone records, what his father spent on excessive beer; but none the less his sobriety in itself makes him more valuable to his employer.

¹ *Vide Cd. 2210*, p. 260, Questions 6541, 6550, 6552, 6554.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 145, Question 3344

have consulted as to the deterioration of our rural population doubt if there is evidence to warrant such an allegation. At any rate they say that it requires proof. . . . If evidence is required to prove that stamina, strength and courage are still to be found in the lads from the rural districts, the graves round Colenso, Spion Kop, and Waggon Hill are surely witnesses.”¹ To quote another passage from the same author: “This allegation” [*i.e.* that the farm labourer is decreasing in stamina owing to migration to the towns], “I think, is somewhat apt to come from people of mature age, who think that their own times produced the high water mark of excellence. I remember the late W. G. Little, a great authority upon agricultural labour, and a well-known tenant farmer himself, saying to me, ‘if all my friends the farmers have said about the deterioration of the farm labourer is true, they must be a race of monkeys by now.’”²

It is indeed easy to explain why the perennial tale of those who praise the past has a special insistence in regard to rural labour. The modern farm labourer certainly lacks many dexterities that were the common property of his forefathers. But he lacks them because, in these days of machinery, there is no need for him to acquire skill of this kind. To regard him as inefficient because he cannot, for example, thresh with a flail, would be almost as absurd as to call Moltke a degenerate warrior on account of his inability to throw the boomerang. There is no reason to dub a man incapable merely because he perceives that it is not worth his while

¹ *Vide* Wilson Fox, *op. cit.* p. 317

² *Vide ibid.* p. 316.

to learn useless accomplishments.¹ Even evidence which appears at first sight to indicate physical weakness in the modern farm labourer may really be explicable on the ground of changes in method. For instance, Mr. Fosbroke said in evidence before the Inter-Departmental Committee on Physical Deterioration: "I may say that thirty years ago, it was the commonest thing for a labourer to carry two and a quarter cwt. of corn up a ladder; now you very seldom see it. Farmers tell me the same."² But may it not be that machinery has diminished the need for such heavy work? And clearly if this is so, the modern man, though just as strong as his predecessors, will feel the strain of such work more, because of its rare occurrence, which means that his muscles are not trained to it. In Oxfordshire I have been told that there is very little work of this kind now on farms, so that men get little chance of acquiring the requisite aptness or muscular development. No doubt something must be attributed to the labourer's increasing reluctance to perform tasks so heavy as to injure his health by producing curvature of the spine or hernia. As a friend of mine, who is an Oxfordshire small-holder, expressed it: "The farmer to-day can't treat the labourer like a toad under a harrow." But the performance of tasks detrimental to the labourer's health can hardly be supposed to benefit the employer in the long run.

¹ Cp. Mr. A. D. Hall's remarks about some of the special agricultural crafts. "In many cases," he writes, "the master ought to be taught to dispense with the craft rather than the men to practise it. For example, sheep-shearers are scarce in many districts, but, instead of instructing men in the use of the shears, it would be wiser to show the master the advantages of a machine. Similarly Dutch barns are more economical than the best of thatchers"—*Vide A Pilgrimage of British Farming* (1913), p. 444.

² *Vide* Cd. 2210, p. 260, Question 6539.

And probably a similar reluctance to do injuriously heavy work has developed in other employments besides agriculture. If so, my argument is not affected. Unless it can be shown that farm labourers have exhibited this reluctance to a greater degree than other workmen, it cannot be regarded as a factor tending to equate the cost of labour in agriculture and other industries, or to make up for the smaller rise of wages which the farm labourer has obtained.

It is unfortunate that no statistics appear to be in existence by which the theory that the farm labourer's physique has deteriorated can be brought to a satisfactory test. But the only statistical evidence I have been able to obtain, though it must be admitted that it refers only to a limited area and a single decade, is definitely opposed to the theory of deterioration. At Cowley Barracks, in Oxfordshire, the books containing the measurements of recruits—both those accepted and those rejected—are preserved from the year 1900 onwards. Taking the two Census years, 1901 and 1911, I have taken the average measures of all the recruits examined in those years who were aged 18 and stated that they were born in some village or other in Oxfordshire, Berkshire, or Buckinghamshire.¹ The results of the inquiry are shown in the following table :—

¹ Those aged 18 were chosen because the largest number appeared to be of that age. The age is that stated by the medical officer to be the recruit's "apparent age" after hearing his attestation on the point. The chest minima and maxima refer to the measurements of the chest when unexpanded and expanded respectively. In some cases I have found it hard to draw a line between villages and small towns, but I have tried to follow the dictates of common sense in the matter. The chest measurements are not given in two cases: the averages for chest minima and maxima are therefore calculated from a slightly smaller number of instances than the other averages.

RECRUITS AGED 18 WHO WERE EXAMINED AT COWLEY BARRACKS
AND STATED THAT THEY WERE NATIVES OF VILLAGES IN
BUCKS, BERKS OR OXON.

(I.) *For the Line*

Year.	Average Height in inches	Average Weight in lbs.	Average Chest in inches.		Number of Recruits.
1901	65.37	120.54	(Minimum) 33.06	(Maximum) 34.66	70
1911	66.84	129.31	33.11	34.53	81

(II.) *For the Militia (1901) and the Special Reserve (1911)*

Year	Average Height in inches.	Average Weight in lbs.	Average Chest in inches		Number of Recruits.
1901	65.27	116.78	(Minimum) 32.76	(Maximum) 34.41	40
1911	64.61	115.90	31.95	34.52	21

It will be noticed that the recruits for the Line improved considerably in physique during the decade, but that the figures for the Special Reserve (1911) show a considerable falling off in height and a slight falling off in weight and unexpanded chest measurements when compared with those for the Militia (1901). The averages for the Militia and Special Reserve are, however, open to suspicion on account of the small number of cases from which the averages have been calculated. I have, therefore, endeavoured to check them by taking the corresponding figures of recruits aged 17, and have obtained the results shown in the following table :—

RECRUITS AGED 17 WHO WERE EXAMINED FOR THE MILITIA (1901) AND THE SPECIAL RESERVE (1911) AT COWLEY BARRACKS AND STATED THAT THEY WERE NATIVES OF VILLAGES IN BUCKS, BERKS OR OXON.

Year	Average Height in inches	Average Weight in lbs.	Average Chest in inches.		Number of Recruits
			(Minimum)	(Maximum)	
1901	63 76	108 26	31 62	32 29	42
1911	65 15	114 59	31 58	34 23	39

Here improvement in physique is manifest, and in fact it is so considerable, that, if recruits aged 17 and 18 are grouped together, their average measurements show an improvement during the decade. The following table gives the figures:—

RECRUITS AGED 17 AND 18 WHO WERE EXAMINED FOR THE MILITIA (1901) AND THE SPECIAL RESERVE (1911) AT COWLEY BARRACKS AND STATED THAT THEY WERE NATIVES OF VILLAGES IN BUCKS, BERKS OR OXON

Year	Average Height in inches	Average Weight in lbs.	Average Chest in inches		Number of Recruits
			(Minimum)	(Maximum)	
1901	64 48	112 42	32 18	33 33	82
1911	64 96	115 01	31 71	34 33	60

On the whole, then, these figures indicate a distinct improvement in the physique of young villagers in the three counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire during the period 1901-1911. It remains to consider the significance of this fact in regard to the general inquiry.

It is unfortunate that figures are not available for earlier decades when the decline in the rural population was marked. Only such figures could yield a really satisfactory answer to the question whether the rural exodus has taken the men of superior physique and produced a decline in the physique of the average labourer in the fields. But though the figures I have obtained only refer to an intercensal period which witnessed an *increase* in the population of the rural districts in each of the three counties, they none the less cast considerable light upon the general problem.¹ They at least witness to forces making for improvement. And it may perhaps be argued that these forces, being strong enough to produce an actual improvement in physique in the period 1901-1911, would not improbably have been strong enough in the years of rural depopulation to prevent physical deterioration. This appears all the more likely when it is remembered that one force tending to produce better physique was certainly more powerful in the period from 1890 to 1900 than it has been in more recent years. The rise in money wages, which was substantial between 1890 and 1900, has not continued at the same rate since the latter year, and such rise as has taken place between 1900 and 1912 has been much more than neutralised by the increase in the cost of living.² But the significance of the physique statistics is not limited to the presumption thus created. Though the rural population has increased in the three counties in

¹ *Vide* Cd. 6258, pp 8-9

² *Vide Report of Land Enquiry*, vol 1. pp 10 11. Oxfordshire and Berkshire are mentioned in the Report as counties where there has been peculiarly little improvement in wages recently.

the period for which I have obtained figures, it by no means follows that there has been no "exodus" of the rural population during that period. The increase in population revealed by the Census of 1911 may have been less than the natural increase due to the excess of births over deaths. It is hard to lay the facts bare in regard to this possibility, for the Annual Reports of the Registrar-General before 1911 do not distinguish between urban and rural districts, so that the natural rate of increase in the rural population of the three counties cannot be determined for the period 1901-1911. In Oxfordshire, however, it seems clear that there has been emigration from the rural districts during the intercensal period. The excess of births over deaths in the rural districts of Oxfordshire in 1911 amounted to 826. Now in the county as a whole the excess of births over deaths was greater in each year from 1901 to 1910 than it was in 1911.¹ And if we assume that in the rural districts the excess in each year from 1901 to 1910 has only been equal to that of 1911, and if we allow a considerable margin for error, we may none the less safely conclude that in the intercensal period the excess of births over deaths, in the rural districts of Oxfordshire, has reached 8000. But the increase in the population of the rural districts during the same period was only 4298. Hence it seems certain that there has been migration from the rural districts of Oxfordshire between 1901 and 1911.

On the whole, then, the averages obtained from the recruiting books at Cowley Barracks suffice to

¹ I need not trouble my readers with the actual figures. They can be obtained from the Annual Reports of the Registrar-General.

throw grave doubt upon the contention that the rural exodus has produced physical deterioration among the agricultural population. The argument based on the fact that wages have risen less in agriculture than in other trades remains, therefore, unshaken. And the conclusion that the deficiency of farm labourers in bargaining power has not been remedied by peculiar mobility becomes probable to the verge of certainty.¹

At the beginning of this chapter, it was pointed out that the question whether agricultural wages in general could be increased involved questions concerning the bargaining power and mobility of the labourers and the profits of farming. Hitherto the discussion has been concerned with the two former points, and has tended to show, firstly, that the labourers are deficient in bargaining power; and, secondly, that this weakness has not been remedied, nor indeed seems likely to be remedied, in the near future, by a mobility in recourse to more profitable employment sufficiently great to produce an in-

¹ A factor left unconsidered in the text, and one almost impossible to measure, is the change in the age distribution of farm labourers in its effect upon the *per capita* efficiency of the class. No doubt migration increased the proportion of men past middle age; but, on the other hand, the reduction in the number of young boys employed, in consequence of compulsory education, must have tended to increase the *per capita* efficiency of the class as a whole. The number of males under 20 years of age employed in agriculture in England and Wales declined from 327,620 in 1851 to 186,070 in 1901 (*vide* Lord Eversley, *op. cit.* p. 269). It seems probable, too, that compulsory education has affected agricultural labour in this direction more than it has affected most other kinds of labour.

In this connection it is not perhaps impertinent to call attention to a fact of important practical bearing, which is revealed by a recently published volume of the 1911 Census [Cd 7019]. The age distribution of farm labourers has improved, from the employer's point of view, since 1901. In 1901, 24.75 per cent of the male agricultural labourers (excluding bailiffs and foremen) were under 20 years old; but the corresponding figure for 1911 is 22.54 per cent. Again, 19.08 per cent of the total number were in 1901 over 55; in 1911 those over 55 were 17.34 per cent of the total. These figures are calculated from those in Appendix I.

fluent scarcity of agricultural labour. Thus it has established a presumption that labour is cheaper in agriculture than it is on an average in other trades. This presumption is in accord with the opinion of one of our greatest authorities on agriculture, for Mr. A. D. Hall, though he supposes the actual income of the farm labourer to be considerably higher than the official figures indicate, or than I think it can be proved to be, nevertheless says that "considering the comparatively skilled character of his work, he is much worse paid than his fellows in any other industry."¹ But this opinion presupposes that the farmer has a peculiarly advantageous position, and it therefore becomes necessary to inquire whether this is in fact the case, and to consider the profits which farmers are able to reap.

In the first place there is a pretty general consensus of opinion that the prospects of farming in Great Britain are now very much better than they were some years ago. Even in 1907, Lord Eversley could write that "there is no part of Great Britain at the present time where there is any difficulty in letting farms at the present rents," and that "in many districts there is keen competition for farms, and it is very difficult for any outsider to find one."² Mr. R. E. Prothero, again, after speaking of the gloomy description of English agriculture given at the beginning of the century by Sir H. Rider Haggard, continues as follows:—

"But no unprejudiced observer in 1912 would

¹ *Vide A Pilgrimage of British Farming* (1913), p. 443. On a previous page I have applied to agricultural work some remarks of Dr Marshall's about *unskilled* labour; but the argument depended not on the degree of skill so much as on the lowness of the labourer's wage.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 293.

paint the picture of farming to-day in such gloomy colours. Owing partly to the reduction of rents, partly to the improvement in prices obtained for agricultural produce, partly to economies in management, the present financial condition of agriculture, as compared with 1901, may be described as prosperous. If he were not haunted by the unknown terrors of social legislation, and the consequent insecurity of his tenure, a tenant-farmer might possibly admit to himself in secret that his industry has not been in a sounder position for the last 35 years.”¹

Mr. A. D. Hall is of much the same opinion. He says “we must recognise that the industry is at present sound and prosperous.” “The great depression,” he adds, “touched its nadir about 1894; since that time prices have been moving upwards and methods improving,” though “it was not until about 1909 that there was any general recognition of returning prosperity.” Now “rents have definitely risen with the demand for land that cannot be satisfied, and in all parts of the country men are obtaining very large returns indeed on the capital they embarked in the business.”²

Secondly, statistical evidence can be adduced in confirmation of these views. The following table shows the decline that has taken place in the number of failures in the farming profession in England and Wales under the Bankruptcy and Deeds of Arrangement Acts.³

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 382.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 431; cf. *Report of Land Enquiry*, vol. 1 pp. 38-40.

³ *Vide* General Annual Reports by the Board of Trade under Section 131 of the Bankruptcy Act, 1883; viz. 13th Report 1896 (267), p. 67; 17th Report, 1900 (316), p. 63; 21st Report, 1904 (312), p. 58; 25th Report, 1908 (254), p. 59; 29th Report, 1912 (284), p. 69; 30th Report

Year	No of Failures	Total Liabilities	Year	No of Failures	Total Liabilities
		£			£
1891	304	339,761	1902	318	323,877
1892	383	461,792	1903	307	322,423
1893	523	678,294	1904	368	383,629
1894	518	773,019	1905	389	398,814
1895	564	736,030	1906	318	339,019
1896	466	544,393	1907	279	271,788
1897	407	383,123	1908	298	296,230
1898	308	273,575	1909	310	301,539
1899	237	226,226	1910	245	243,264
1900	282	303,372	1911	305	392,301
1901	302	320,618	1912	336	350,553

These figures reveal the striking fact that the average annual numbers of failures during each of the three last septennial periods for which figures are published have been :—

1892-1898	. . .	452 71
1899-1905	. . .	314 71
1906-1912	. . .	298 71

Again, when it is remembered that the fall in the price of corn was the prime factor in producing agricultural depression the recent recovery of corn prices becomes especially significant, though something must of course be allowed for the fall in the value of money. The following table shows the septennial average prices per imperial bushel of British corn for each year from 1900 to 1912 inclusive :—¹

(262), p. 61. Probably the decline has been really greater than the Table indicates, for before 1900 the figures do not include orders under Section 125 of the Act in relation to the estates of deceased debtors.

¹ *Vide Agricultural Statistics, 1912* (Cd. 6906), p. 209. Since the statement in the text went to the press the figures for 1913 have been published, and these show a still further advance in prices: viz. wheat 4s. 1d., barley 3s. 3½d., and oats 2s. 4½d. per Imperial bushel; *vide* Letter from the Editor of "Willich's Tithe Tables" in *The Guardian*, Jan. 9, 1914, p. 39.

Year	Wheat		Barley.		Oats	
	s.	d.	s	d	s	d
1900	3	4 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	2	0 $\frac{3}{4}$
1901	3	5 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	2	1
1902	3	6 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	2	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
1903	3	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	2	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
1904	3	6	3	1	2	2 $\frac{1}{4}$
1905	3	5	3	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	2	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
1906	3	5 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	0 $\frac{1}{2}$	2	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
1907	3	6 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	2	3
1908	3	7 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	2	3
1909	3	9 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	0 $\frac{3}{4}$	2	2 $\frac{1}{2}$
1910	3	10 $\frac{1}{2}$	3	0 $\frac{3}{4}$	2	2 $\frac{3}{4}$
1911	3	11 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	1 $\frac{1}{4}$	2	3 $\frac{1}{4}$
1912	4	0 $\frac{1}{4}$	3	3	2	4

In 1912 the septennial average price of British wheat was higher than it had been since 1891, that of British barley higher than in any year since 1894, and that of British oats higher than in any year since 1889.

Nor are selling prices the only things to be considered. Farmers have had time to adjust themselves to the new conditions introduced by the fall in prices. New methods have been adopted; rents have been adjusted; and production has been both cheapened and improved by a more ready use of the ever-growing resources of agricultural and engineering science.¹ It must always be remembered that the influence of a low level of prices is by no means the same as that of a fall in prices.

There remains, however, a further point to be considered. To the contention that farmers are in a privileged position because they get their labour

¹ Cp. R. H. Rew, *op. cit.* (Cd 3273) p. 14; R. E. Prothero, *op. cit.*, pp. 382-392.

cheaper than other employers, it may be objected that the competitive nature of modern business precludes the possibility of such a state of things. It may be urged that the existence of special advantages is bound to create keen competition and that equality of profits, measured in relation to ability, will, in this case, rapidly be secured through new comers bidding for land and driving up rents. According to this view, if labour is cheap, it is rents and not profits that will be high. But, it may be replied, if this is so, the fact that profits are no higher in agriculture than in other industries—if that is the fact—need not prevent a rise in the cost of labour, for such a rise will, according to this theory, involve, not a reduction of net profits but a fall in rent. In reality, however, it is more than doubtful whether a high rate of profits in farming would at once arouse competition in the way that is here supposed. Various conditions are opposed to the free circulation of employers between farming and other branches of industry. In the first place the judgment of possible competitors is peculiarly liable to be deceived by concealment of profits. There are no joint-stock companies in agriculture to reveal the possibilities of the industry by a declaration of dividends or the publication of accounts. The fact that farmers are so often both capitalists and entrepreneurs makes it easy for substantial profits to be concealed, under the plea that the obvious prosperity of a particular individual is to be explained not by the profits of his farming but by the money he inherited. Again the farmer lives in a village, and this means that the index of prosperity provided by increasing comforts or

luxuries is not easily read at a distance by a business man in a town who is looking about for an opening for his son. How can he tell what the farmer receives, so to say, in the shape of profits in kind—how tell whether his horses are kept in the way of business or for pleasure, or whether, when he takes his gun, he is going to have a day's sport or is intent merely on keeping down vermin or rabbits? As Mr. A. D. Hall remarks, "the farmer obtains without expense much of open air and country life and sport for which the city man is prepared to pay heavily."¹ But how can the "city man" measure these advantages? The farmer is not his neighbour: he does not know whether the farmer's income is won with much or with little toil, whether he rises early or late, or how often he gives lawn tennis parties or plays billiards in the afternoon. A rise in the profits of farming may very well take the form of more frequent "afternoons off," but these can increase a good deal without arousing competition among dwellers in the towns. It is different with neighbours: the carpet-manufacturer knows quite well whether the boot-maker in the next villa takes his holiday at Llandudno or in Paris, and he knows the man well enough to estimate his abilities and form a shrewd opinion as to whether his own son is likely to do so well.

There is another factor which withstands competition and prevents perfect mobility of entrepreneurs in regard to agriculture. The facts that a large farm must be a farm of many acres and that there is little scope for division of labour in an industry which is dependent on the recurrence of

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 432.

the seasons mean that, compared with manufacture, all farming is really on a small scale, whether we measure the unit of industry by the capital engaged or by the number of men employed. But this has an important effect in restricting the area from which competition may be expected, for, as Dr. Marshall says, "in small businesses, in which the master is little more than the head workman, specialized skill is very important."¹ In business on the grand scale, mobility from one branch to another is considerable. As Walter Bagehot once said "The summits (if I may so say) of the various kinds of business are, like the tops of mountains, much more alike than the parts below—the bare principles are much the same, it is only the rich variegated details of the lower strata that so contrast with one another."² But in agriculture the small scale of business shuts out the competition of entrepreneurs who have not been specially trained for it. The agricultural industry lies entirely upon the "lower strata," and the heights of employer's ability in farming never reach snow level.

Thus for various reasons the business ability of the town enters only very tardily, if at all, into competition with that of farmers. And the low wages of agricultural labour, making it hard for a man to save; the poor condition of agricultural credit, making it hard for a man to borrow; and the various gaps in the ladder of small holdings by which a man might mount, all tend to prevent many

¹ *Vide op cit* p 606

² *Vide* Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution* [cheap edition, 1902], p. 198.

recruits joining the farmers from the ranks of the rural labourers. It seems impossible to avoid the conclusion that farmers form to a great extent a close hereditary class, more ready to combine to keep rents low than to bid against one another for the use of farms. And hence there seems no reason to distrust the arguments which tend to show that farmers are in a privileged position, and, on account of the semi-monopolistic condition of their industry and the cheap labour they can obtain, reap, in proportion to their ability and the toil they undergo, exceptionally high profits.

One particular of this conclusion can be illustrated by some statistics I have collected as to the proportion of the total number of farmers in various villages who are the sons of farmers. The villages have been chosen merely by the chance that they were places as to which I was able to get information through the kindness of friends. For the purposes of the inquiry, a "farmer" was defined as one who regularly employed agricultural labour other than that of his own family. The following table shows the results of the investigation :—¹

Parish	County	No of Farmers	No who are Children of Farmers
1	Oxfordshire	4	2
2	"	6	6
3	"	7	7
4	"	10	7 (possibly 9)
5	"	7	6
6	"	7	4

¹ The list is arranged in counties according to the average wages paid in 1907, beginning with the county where wages are lowest.

Parish.	County	No of Farmers	No who are Children of Farmers
7	Oxfordshire	3	3
8	"	11	11 (?)
9	"	7	5 (possibly 6)
10	"	6	6
11	"	7	4 (possibly 5)
12	"	8	6
13	"	9	9
14	"	4	3
15	"	9	8
16	"	2	2
17	"	5	2
18	"	5	5
19	"	15	7
20	Dorset	23	9
21	"	10	7
22	"	1	1
23	"	1	1
24	"	4	2
25	"	17	9
26	Suffolk	5	3
27	"	4	4
28	"	9	5
29	Gloucestershire	11	3
30	"	3	2
31	Cambridgeshire	5	2
32	"	5	5
33	Huntingdon	6	6
34	"	8	6 ¹
35	Essex	10	9
36	Somerset	6	6
37	"	15	4
38	Berkshire	8	6
39	"	1	1
40	"	2	1
41	Buckinghamshire	4	3
42	Northamptonshire	7	3
43	"	12	12
44	Rutland	5	5
45	Herefordshire	10	8

¹ These are described not as children of farmers, but as "of farming stock."

Parish	County	No of Farmers.	No. who are Children of Farmers
46	Herefordshire	4	3
47	"	6	6
48	Devon	15	13
49	"	49	45
50	Hampshire	1	1
51	Cornwall	7	5
52	Warwickshire	14	11
53 & 54	"	28	12 ¹
55	Lincolnshire	5	3
56	Yorkshire (North Riding)	12	10
57	Cheshire	22	17
58	"	18	12
59	Leicestershire	3	1
60	Surrey	6	4
61 & 62	Yorkshire (West Riding)	44	29
63	"	34 (?)	20 (?)
64	Derbyshire	5 ²	5
	Totals ³	597	423

An important qualification must be made with regard to the implications of the foregoing arguments. Those arguments suggest that farmers receive, in proportion to their ability and industry, a peculiarly high rate of profit. They do not, however, necessarily imply that the income of the existing farmers is large enough to admit of reduction by a rise in the cost of labour. The

¹ Besides these I gather that four others out of the twenty-eight are of farming stock though not children of farmers.

² Some of these five are not regular employers of agricultural labour, but are described as working alone "with occasional help."

³ Those returned as children of farmers are 71.6 per cent of the total number; but in Oxfordshire, the county of lowest wages, 78 per cent (or possibly 81.1 per cent) of the farmers reported on were described as children of farmers. And obviously the number who come of hereditary farming stock may exceed the number whose fathers were farmers. A farmer may have succeeded his grandfather: the father may have died before having a farm of his own. The case of a peer who succeeds to the title on his grandfather's death is parallel.

conditions which tend to shelter the farmer from the competition of urban business ability, and from the competition of the agricultural skill of members of the rural labouring class, enable the farmer to retain an exceptional advantage. But in the case of the actual individuals at present engaged in farming, this advantage may mean not that agricultural employers are pocketing a large income, but that men who would be unable to make any profits at all in the face of competition are, under existing conditions, making some sort of income out of the profits of their farming. Thus the conclusion to which the arguments of the preceding paragraphs tend would not be affected by any demonstration that existing farmers could not continue in business if their incomes were reduced. That conclusion simply is that the exceptional advantage of cheap labour might be refused to the farmer, and the agricultural industry still be left with expectations of profit equal to the average in trades unsheltered from competition. If the removal of the advantage would, in fact, drive many individual farmers into bankruptcy, that would only be an indication that such men are of ability inferior to that which is on the margin of bankruptcy in other branches of industry—that they are in fact only keeping their heads above water by means of a semi-monopolistic privilege. A rise in the cost of labour sufficient to drive such men out of business would still leave the agricultural industry with possibilities of gain great enough to attract abler entrepreneurs from outside, if only the conditions hindering to free competition could be removed.

We are thus brought round to two important

practical questions—the question whether in fact many farmers are only kept from bankruptcy by the advantage of cheap labour, and the question whether the industry could be thrown open to freer competition.

In regard to the first question, it must be noted that some men whose incomes could not be reduced without involving them in bankruptcy might none the less be able to meet a rise in the cost of labour. Their incomes may be low not from lack of ability, but through idleness or want of education. In that case minimum wage regulation might stimulate them to greater effort, or the provision of better means for the diffusion of scientific information might save them from the perils of ignorance. At the same time, it would seem probable, from what has already been said, that the ranks of farmers do contain men of inadequate natural ability. The ability of a particular class depends *ceteris paribus* on the width of the social area from which it is recruited. But it has been shown that the farming class is recruited from a particularly narrow area, and that it is, in fact, to a great extent hereditary.¹ Thus the second question becomes important. Can more ability be enlisted? Can the conditions which at present prevent free entry to the farming class be removed or rendered less influential? It is hardly possible to give a comprehensive answer. But a few points may be noticed. On the one

¹ The dearth of certain forms of farming ability is referred to by Mr. A. D. Hall. He writes: "We doubt if there are many more profitable enterprises open at the present day than would be provided by a 2000 acre farm on good land with an adequate backing of capital. But we are rather deficient at present in the kind of men to run a business of the kind—the highly educated expert we find in charge of the great domains in Germany or the syndicate farms in France." *Vide op. cit.* pp. 437-438.

hand, it is to be feared that minimum wage regulation and an increase in the number of farming bankruptcies would tend to make the industry appear less attractive to outsiders. On the other hand, the vacancy of many farms and the stress of the period of transition might remove some of the difficulties which bar the small-holder from acquiring additional land and might make landlords more willing to split up farms and meet the requirements of such tenants.¹ Besides, it is indisputable that definite measures might be taken for the attainment of the desired end. The development of agricultural colleges might give the sons of urban business men the necessary technical knowledge which would enable them to enter the lists of agriculture, while the provision of scholarships might render such colleges available to talented members of the labouring class.² More decided encouragement might be given to the development of small-holdings, with a view to creating a ladder by which labourers and their sons might gradually ascend to the position of wage-paying farmers. Such encouragement might take the form of a government grant to bear the cost of change, so that the small-holder need only pay in rent the equivalent of the value of the land for small-holding

¹ Possibly the growing taste for country life among townfolk may tend to make them more inclined to put their sons into farming.

² The rise in agricultural wages would itself tend to improve the chances of a man of labouring stock doing well as a small-holder. It would make it more possible for farm-labourers to save money. It would improve the market for the small-holders' produce by increasing the number of neighbours who could afford to buy eggs, vegetables, fruit, butter, etc. It will be noticed that I have not spoken of the introduction of practical agricultural subjects into the curriculum of rural elementary schools. I shall return to this subject later, and will only say here that in my opinion the disadvantages of such a development would far outweigh any gain to be got from it.

purposes, and would not be required in addition to pay the interest on the expenses of converting large farms into small, or on that part of the selling price of the land which represents, not its agricultural value, but the social and sporting amenities connected with the ownership of land in England. It should be noted that the expenditure of public money for these purposes, even if it could not be justified by the economic possibilities of small-holdings viewed in isolation, might yet be a wise stroke of national policy, because of its effect in widening the avenue by which men of ability could advance to join the class of large farmers. Again, the organisation of agricultural credit under public control would help to open the career of farming to talent, by making it easy for capital to be borrowed by those who possessed the ability to use it. At present, as is well known, the conditions under which farmers borrow capital often preclude its most efficient use, for the creditor is frequently a corn or cake dealer with whom it is understood that the debtor must afterwards do business.¹

It is now time to attempt some summary of the conclusions toward which the arguments of this chapter have been tending.

In the first place, it seems that agricultural labour in England is peculiarly cheap—that English agricultural labourers sell their labour for a smaller proportion of its value to their employers than is

¹ Mr. A. D. Hall says that "in all parts of the country, when one gets below the surface, one nearly always finds a large proportion, even a majority, of the farmers entirely tied to some trading intermediary who has advanced them money." *Vide op. cit.* p. 442. Cp. *Report of Land Enquiry*, vol. 1. p. 421, where a Kentish farmer is quoted as saying that "credit can only be obtained by an agreement to sell your produce to a particular agent or dealer."

obtained by labourers in other trades. The weakness of farm labourers in bargaining is not remedied by peculiar mobility in flight to other employments.

Secondly, as agricultural labour in general is cheap, the presumption is that the dearest labour in agriculture is cheaper than the dearest labour in other industries. This may at least be supposed, until definite evidence to the contrary is produced.

Thirdly, the advantage of this cheap labour must go to some one. And as the prices of most agricultural products depend on the conditions of the world's markets, it can hardly be maintained that this advantage goes to the consumer. It can scarcely be denied that foreign competition would prevent the cost of a rise in wages from being transferred to the consumer in augmented prices, except in the case of a few "sheltered" products, among which milk may perhaps be included. On the whole, then, it appears that either the farmer or the landlord or both gain by the cheapness of agricultural labour.

Fourthly, in so far as the advantage goes to the landlord in augmented rents, the removal of the advantage would not affect the agricultural entrepreneur, but would simply lead to a fall in the rent of agricultural land. At the same time, the establishment of a Land Court would be advisable to prevent the tenant farmer suffering from any deficiency in his power of bargaining with the landlord for a reduction of rent.

Fifthly, defects in competition make it likely that in fact the advantage of the cheap labour is to a great extent reaped by the farmer. Its removal therefore would tend to mean (1) that those to

whom semi-monopolistic privilege brings a large income would have their incomes reduced; (2) that farmers who accept the advantage as an opportunity for idleness would be stimulated to greater effort; and (3) that those who are too inefficient to gain large incomes under shelter, or to improve their methods when the shelter was taken away, would be driven over the margin into bankruptcy.

Sixthly, it appears that various measures might be adopted to throw the career of farming more open to talents. Thus the place of the inefficient might be taken by better men.

With regard to these conclusions, two points remain to be noticed. The conclusions have been reached without any reference to the possibility of a rise in agricultural wages leading to an improvement in the efficiency of the labourers. It seems so unlikely that *all* farm labourers are deliberately idle or underfed that I have thought it best to reserve the question of a possible improvement in their efficiency for consideration in the next chapter, which treats of the special circumstances of certain groups of agricultural workers. Secondly, it appears that, apart from any improvement in their efficiency, a rise in the wages of all agricultural labourers would occasion loss to other individuals. It would tend to mean a reduction in the income of landlords, or stress for some and bankruptcy for other farmers.¹ Whether the gain to many labouring families would

¹ The question whether it would throw labourers out of work will be considered later. If the presumption that the dearest labour in agriculture is peculiarly cheap be accepted, it follows, as has been shown above, that a general rise in agricultural wages need not produce any unemployment.

outweigh these losses is a question on which opinions will differ in accordance with the various ideals men cherish of social and national welfare. But at all events the enforcement of a minimum wage, which would bring these consequences for good or evil, need not be condemned as infringing principles of freedom and equality. It would not create, but destroy a special privilege. It would put agriculture on a footing of equality with other industries. And in so far as it led to the elimination of the inefficient by bankruptcy, it would only do this by introducing, into a semi-monopolised sphere, conditions which are always present, and are generally considered as, in the long run, beneficent, in those other regions of economic life where competition is comparatively vigorous and free.

CHAPTER III

SOME CONSIDERATIONS RESPECTING AGRICULTURAL WAGES IN PARTICULAR DISTRICTS

THE peculiar features of agricultural wages discussed in the last chapter have in all probability a greater prominence in some districts than in others. The large differences between the total earnings of labourers of the same grade in different counties must affect the bargaining power and the mobility of the several groups. In the counties of low wages, poverty must prove a greater hindrance, both to trade unionism and to migration, than is elsewhere the case. Again, the possibility of flight to urban employment is clearly affected by geographical circumstances. The neighbourhood of large towns facilitates migration. As a general rule, too, it may be said that agricultural wages are low in the purely agricultural counties, and high in the neighbourhood of mines and manufactures.¹

From these considerations it would appear probable that, in the districts where wages are low, the cost of labour to the employer is also less than is the rule in agriculture. Where wages are low and chances of alternative employment poor, the

¹ *Vide* the maps in Wilson Fox's First and Second Reports (Cd. 346, and Cd. 2376), and in Rowntree and Kendall, *op. cit.*

labourer is likely to be forced to sell his labour at a price which falls short of its value by a greater amount than is the case with the farm labourers of more favoured districts.

Now in so far as the differences in wages represent differences in the cost of labour, it is clear that in the counties where wages are low a greater rise in wages would be possible than where wages are high. Except from defects in competition, it is rent and not wages which should vary with the situational advantages of farms, or with the quality of the soil.¹ It follows, therefore, that the cost of labour could be made equal by raising wages more in the districts where labour was specially cheap than elsewhere, and the industry in the districts where the rise was great be none the less left with expectations of profit equal to the average. For example, if the labourers of Dorsetshire are worth as much on an average to their employers as the labourers of Derbyshire are to theirs, and the difference in wages between the two counties does, therefore, precisely measure the difference in the cost of labour, then the wages of Dorset might be raised to an equality with those of Derbyshire, and farming in Dorset would still remain as rich in possibilities of profit as farming in Derbyshire. In that case the rise in the cost of labour in Dorset need not prevent the industry from attracting entrepreneurs of ability equal to that of the Derbyshire farmers.

But though there are, as we have seen, reasons

¹ Mr. Rowntree asserts that "there is apparently no difference in the quality of the soil, or in the kind of farming pursued, or in the transit facilities, between the counties with low and with high wages." *Vide op. cit.* p. 24. But the argument in the text holds good whether or no this can be established.

for supposing that agricultural labour is cheaper in those districts where wages are peculiarly low than in the high-wage districts, it by no means follows that the difference in the cost of labour is in fact as great as the difference in wages. Labour may be cheaper to the employer in the low-wage than in the high-wage counties, and yet the labourer may be less efficient in the former than in the latter. Though cheaper, the labour may not be as much cheaper as the wages are lower. And, on close inspection of the conditions, it appears probable that this is actually the case. It must be remembered that one ground for the opinion that agricultural labour is cheap where wages are low is the consideration that poverty reduces the bargaining power and mobility of the labourer. But, in so far as this factor is important, it is obvious that the lowness of wages cannot entirely be explained as a difference in the cost of labour, for the cheapness of labour is here regarded as resulting from the poverty occasioned by a low level of wages. In so far as it is their comparative poverty which leads certain groups of men to sell their labour cheaper than others, the cheapness of their labour cannot be the explanation of the fact that they are, to start with, comparatively poor. And though other factors, such as the distance of large towns, tend to reduce the cost of labour in the low-wage counties, a comparison of the conditions of Durham and Dorset suggests, though it cannot be said to prove, that, even where the factor of alternative employment is strong in one and weak in the other of two districts, the difference in wages does not precisely coincide with the difference in the cost of labour. It remains

probable that, between two such districts, there is a difference in the efficiency of the labourers as well as in the cost of their labour to the employer.

In Durham agricultural wages are higher than elsewhere in England, and the chances of alternative employment are good. In Dorset, on the other hand, there is little urban development and agricultural wages are extremely low—as low as in Norfolk, and lower than in any other county except Oxfordshire.¹ The fact that the proportion between arable and pasture is nearly the same in the two counties makes it possible to attempt a rough estimate of the relative productivity of the labourers employed in them.² And if we take, on the one hand, the areas under crops and grass, and, on the other hand, the numbers of persons engaged in agriculture in 1911, we find that in the county of high wages the number of persons engaged in agriculture works out at 28.9 per 1000 acres, while in Dorset it reaches 34.9 for the same area.³ On the face of it, this might mean that the soil of Dorset is cultivated more intensively than that of Durham. But the following table, showing the

¹ The average earnings per week of all classes of farm labourers are stated to be 22s. in Durham, and 16s. 6d. in Dorset. For "horsemen" the figures are: Durham 21s. 9d., and Dorset 16s. 2d. *Vide* Cd. 5460, pp. 3, 5, 11, 13. In 1911 the population of the urban districts of Durham was 968,741, and of the rural districts, 401,119. In Dorset the population of the urban districts was 118,458, and of the rural districts, 104,808. *Vide* Cd. 6258, pp. 117 and 123.

² In 1911 the figures were: for Dorset, 166,328 acres arable, and 311,283 acres of permanent grass; and, for Durham, 145,107 acres of arable, and 285,395 acres of permanent grass. *Vide* Cd. 6021, p. 35.

³ The numbers engaged in agriculture in 1911 were 12,437 in Durham (10,371 being males), and 16,680 (15,651 being males) in Dorset; *vide* Cd. 7019, pp. 102, 108. These figures include farmers and their relatives as well as bailiffs and labourers. The numbers of labourers alone were 6031 in Durham and 11,484 in Dorset, *i.e.* 14 per thousand acres under crops and grass in Durham, and 24 per thousand acres in Dorset.

average yield of the principal crops per acre in the two counties for the ten years 1901-1911, sufficiently disposes of that possibility.¹

	Wheat	Barley	Oats.	Beans	Peas	Turnips and Swedes.	Man- gold	Potatoes.
	Bushels	Bushels	Bushels	Bushels	Bushels	Tons	Tons	Tons
Durham	33 32	37 35	37 27	25 16	23.84	14.69	16.40	5.41
Dorset	31 90	34 43	47 77	29 79	24 74	12.21	21 95	4.97

	Hay (Clover, etc.)	Hay (Permanent Grass)
	Cwts	Cwts.
Durham . . .	33 11	22 25
Dorset . . .	26 42	24.25

The significance of this table is increased if the areas under the respective crops are taken into consideration. Taking the two counties together, the area under wheat and barley in 1911 largely exceeded the area under oats, and the whole of this excess occurred in Dorset. In both counties peas and beans are an insignificant crop. In 1911 the area under turnips and swedes was in Dorset more than 4 times, and in Durham more than 27 times, as great as the area under mangold.

It appears, then, from these figures that fewer men are required in Durham than in Dorset to raise a given crop from a given area of land. At the same time it is arguable that this state of things might be explained on the hypotheses (1) that the

¹ *Vide* Cd. 6056 *passim*.

soil of Dorset is less fertile than that of Durham, and (2) that the cost of labour is so much lower in Dorset, that it is profitable to expend the extra effort necessary to raise crops nearly equal to those of Durham from the Dorsetshire soil. But possibly some slight evidence against the first¹ of these hypotheses may be extracted from the fact that in Durham a much larger proportion of the total area of the county is classed as "mountain and heath land used for grazing" than is the case in Dorset.² It is true that this land is not included in the area "under crops and grass"; but it is perhaps not unreasonable to assume that in a county where there is a large proportion of moorland there will also be, within the cultivated area, a large proportion of very poor land. And even if this is not the case, and if the soil of Dorset is in fact inferior to that of Durham, evidence that the labourers of Durham are the more efficient may be gleaned from another circumstance. If the soil of Dorset is peculiarly intractable, the same can hardly be believed to be true of the horses used there. And in Durham fewer men manage more horses.³ Indeed, it is practically impossible to distinguish a class of "ordinary labourers" in Durham.⁴ This fact appears significant when we remember that the average rates of wages for the whole of England are 18s. 4d. for all classes of agricultural labourers, 17s. 6d. for

¹ It will be noticed that the second hypothesis depends on the first.

² *Vide* Cd. 6597, p. 47. The figures are (for 1912). Dorset, 28,115 acres; Durham, 77,284 acres. The total area of Durham is 645,926, and of Dorset, 624,031 acres.

³ The figures are (for 1911): 14,328 horses used for agriculture in Durham, and 13,772 in Dorset. *Vide* Cd. 6021, p. 35.

⁴ Mr. Rowntree, speaking of Durham and Northumberland, says, "there are scarcely any labourers in those counties who are not in charge of animals," *vide op. cit.* p. 24, footnote.

ordinary labourers, and 18s. 9d. for "horsemen."¹ Nor can it fairly be urged against these arguments that we have no statistical evidence as to the degree to which machinery is used in each county and that possibly the labourers of Dorset manage more machines than those of Durham, and show skill in this rather than in the management of horses. If the labourers of Dorset are as efficient as those of Durham, and the low wages of the former county do indicate that labour is very cheap, it is hard to see why labour-saving machinery should be used to a greater extent there than where labour is, *ex hypothesi*, dearer. And if it is so used the large number of men employed per acre in Dorset is all the more remarkable and all the more difficult to explain by the hypothesis of inferior soil.² On the whole, then, it appears probable that the labourers in Durham are more efficient than those of Dorset. The difference in wages between the two counties cannot be entirely explained as a difference in the cost of labour. And not improbably the case is the same with other counties which differ largely in their average wage-rates. Durham and Dorset were selected for examination for the merely accidental reason that while they differ in regard to wages they resemble one another in the ratio of

¹ *Vide* Cd. 5460, p. xvi.

² At first sight it may appear that one of my criticisms of the theory I combat could be turned against my own argument. If the cost of labour is not high in Durham, why, it may be asked, do farmers use so many horses? The answer is not hard to find. I do not deny that in Durham labour is dearer than in Dorset. All I contend is that the labour in Durham is not as much dearer as wages are higher—that *part* of the difference in wages represents a difference in efficiency not in the cost of labour. Also horses can hardly be regarded as substitutes for labour in the same way that machinery is a substitute for it. One never hears complaints of horses driving men out of employment.

arable to pasture which obtains within their frontiers. And it may be urged that the case of Durham is peculiarly strong because the very good chances of alternative employment which obtain there may be regarded as a factor tending to make labour dear.¹ If in Durham the height of wages above the average cannot be explained as a difference in the cost of labour and nothing more, *a fortiori* the efficiency of the labourers must be high in high-wage counties where chances of alternative employment are poorer than they are in Durham.²

It is now necessary to return to the main problem. We have seen that in so far as the low wages of certain districts can be explained on the hypothesis that labour is peculiarly cheap there, it is possible to raise them more than the wages of other districts, and yet leave the industry as profitable as it is in the districts of high wages. But it has also been shown to be probable that only part of the difference in wages represents a difference in the cost of labour, and that the lowness of wages in certain counties is partly due to the inferior efficiency of the workmen. The question therefore arises whether any specially large rise in wages is possible in such

¹ It is true that the population of the urban districts of Durham is not more than 70.7 per cent of the total population of the county, which, though much greater than the percentage in Dorset (53.1), is less than that for the whole of England (78.1). But the existence of the mining "villages" makes the Durham percentage deceptive in its moderation. The *rural* districts of Durham contain no less than 33 "villages" of more than 4000 inhabitants—five of them, indeed, having more than 10,000 inhabitants each, *vide* Cd. 6258, pp. 9, 127-130.

² Cp. the evidence collected in the *Report of the Land Enquiry* (vol. 1.), pp. 58-60. It must be remembered, however, that the comparison made in the text between the conditions in Durham and those in Dorset cannot be made to yield any *precise* conclusion as to the efficiency of the *wage-earning* labourers in the two counties, because the total labour force contains a very much larger proportion of farmers and their relatives in Durham than in Dorset. I only claim that the comparison creates a very tentative presumption.

counties, over and above any rise that may be possible throughout the country, and in addition to any special improvement due even in these cases to the peculiar cheapness of labour, if indeed the low level of wages is *partly* to be explained—as seems probable—on the hypothesis that labour in these counties, though inferior, is also cheaper than elsewhere.

At first sight it might appear that such a question should be answered in the negative without more ado. But in fact the problem requires closer examination. "Efficiency" is a word that has many possible meanings. It may indicate what the labourer actually does, or what he could do if he chose, or what he might be enabled to do if the conditions of his employment were changed. And when the lowness of wages in certain counties is partly attributed to the inferior efficiency of the workmen, it is quite clear that the word efficiency is used in the first of these senses. Labour is cheap or dear to the employer according as the ratio between the value of wages and the value of the work actually done is small or large. But the possibility of a rise in wages depends not only on the cheapness or dearness of labour, but on the susceptibility of the labourer's "efficiency" to improvement. This then is the question which requires an answer. In counties where the labourers are comparatively "inefficient"—that is to say where the work they accomplish is of comparatively small value—can they be made more efficient? Can they be made to accomplish better results—to turn out a more valuable net product? Now, in the first place, it is clear that the low wages of a particular district may, when the labourer is rewarded largely by time-

wages and but little by piecework wages, induce the workman deliberately to limit his efforts. I have heard labourers in Oxfordshire say that they are not paid to work hard. And it is easily understandable that where the level of wages depends to a great extent on local custom, and in an industry which affords small prospects of promotion, the individual will tend to feel that the gain involved in "taking it easy" is certain and substantial and that a rise in wages, though it might be made possible by a general "speeding up," will certainly not be accomplished by an individual doing his best. It is not impossible, then, that a rise in wages might in some cases awake greater energy by merely appealing to the labourers' sense of fairness. A more certain force tending to diminish deliberate idleness would be the increase of piecework and the improvement of chances of promotion or of the reward of promotion. If the ordinary labourer feels that promotion is possible and well rewarded, he will strive to show himself fitted for it. Healthy emulation will then tend to make the ordinary labourers worth better wages. With regard to piecework, it must, however, be noticed that it is already "more common in the arable than pastoral districts, particularly in those counties where the weekly cash wages are the lowest."¹ The possibility of its increase in the low-wage counties is perhaps reduced by this fact. On the other hand it appears that "more piecework is given on large farms than on small ones";² and hence it may be argued that an increase in the size of farms might facilitate the improvement both of work and wages. On larger farms, too, the hope

¹ *Vide* Cd. 2376, p. 18.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 19.

of promotion might be greater, for there would be greater need for foremen.¹ Whether the incentive to industry could be stimulated by the fixing of minimum wage-rates, which provided for a more than proportionate increase in the reward of the higher grades of labourers, is hard to determine. Such rates would no doubt make promotion more attractive; but they might diminish the chances of such promotion by raising the cost of shepherds', cattlemen's, and horsemen's labour, and thus inducing the smaller farmers or members of their families to do more of such work themselves.²

A second consideration springs from the dependence of the labourer's efficiency upon wise direction. An inefficient employer cannot afford to pay such high wages as one of greater ability. A stupid farmer misdirects his labour force; and the tasks which the men perform, when thus misdirected, are not so valuable as they might be. Two reasons suggest that the possibilities of improvement in labour-direction are especially great in the low-wage counties. Those counties are, as a general rule, comparatively remote from the centres of industry, and hence the competition of townsmen is even less likely there than elsewhere to raise the average of farming ability, while the low wages of the labourers, by making it hard for wage-earners to save, protect

¹ In this connection it is well to recall Mr. A. D. Hall's opinion as to the unusual profitableness of large farms, *vide supra*, p. 61, note.

² The proportions between the wages of different grades of agricultural labour in different districts are well worth special study, though the subject is fertile in difficulty. The possibilities of profit-sharing in agriculture are also deserving of careful consideration. The superiority of interested labour is not improbably one cause of the superior productivity *per capita* of those engaged in agriculture in Durham as compared with those in Dorset. In Durham, farmers and graziers and their relatives formed 49.31 per cent of the total number of farm workers in 1911. In Dorset they only amounted to 29.56 per cent of the total number.

the farming class against any intrusion of competing ability from below. Moreover, the low wages not improbably make the employer careless in the direction and supervision of labour. Mr. A. D. Hall remarks that "many farmers waste manual labour because it is cheap."¹ Thus, on the whole, there seems to be sufficient ground for the belief that any measures which tended to throw the career of farming more open to talent would be especially effective in the low-wage districts, and that the improvement in farming skill, as well as the incentive to better labour-direction provided by the rise in wages, would increase the possibility of raising wages in those districts without a corresponding addition to the cost of labour.

The question of able labour-direction naturally leads one to another inquiry. Can the payment of low wages be itself regarded as a form of mismanagement? Is not paying wages which involve under-feeding as stupid a mistake from the farmer's point of view as providing the labourer with poor machinery, or decrepit horses, or tools that constantly need mending? Looked at from another side, the problem may be stated thus. When allowances have been made for improvement in the labourer's willingness to exert himself, and for greater skill in labour direction on the part of the farmers, there remains the possibility that the men of the low-wage counties are inferior in capacity, and the question therefore arises whether such

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 445. The willingness of labourers to work hard also clearly depends a great deal upon the tact and wisdom of the employer, as is well illustrated by the fact that some Bedfordshire farm labourers told Mr. H. H. Mann that when on piecework "they must not earn as much as they could, or the rate would be immediately lowered." *Vide Sociological Papers for 1904*, p. 172.

inferiority, if it exists, is inborn and irremediable or whether it can be removed either by a rise in wages or by some other means.

In attempting to answer this question, the first fact which calls for note is the failure of wage-curves and anthropometric curves to correspond. Though the high wages which prevail on an average among the farm labourers of Scotland might perhaps be explained by the hereditary physique of the tallest people in Europe, it seems impossible to account for, or even partially to account for, the local variations in agricultural wages in England by any racial distinctions leading to differences in stature and innate bodily strength such as no architect of environment could hope, by taking thought, to alter. It is true that the available anthropometric statistics are far from being satisfactory. But the best set of figures I have been able to obtain—that contained in the Report made in 1883 by the Anthropometric Committee of the British Association—gives no support to the opinion that the inferior physical condition of the men in the low-wage counties, even if it be granted that their physical condition is inferior, is traceable to innate racial qualities rather than to alterable circumstances. Wages, if we take all classes of farm labourers together, are highest in Durham; but the average height of adult males¹ born in that county is, according to the Report, less than that of adult male natives of Norfolk, and in Norfolk the average earnings of all classes of agricultural labourers are as low as those of Dorset and only higher than those of Oxfordshire. Again, agricultural earnings are higher in the West Riding of

¹ The figures apply to males aged from 23 to 50.

Yorkshire than elsewhere in that county of super-average wages, but while the stature of natives of this Riding is less than that of natives of such low-wage shires as Norfolk, Essex, Suffolk, Worcestershire, Bedford, and Dorset, the East and North Ridings of Yorkshire show a higher stature than any other English district or county reported on by the Committee. On the other hand, low wages and low stature sometimes go together as in Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire (taken together by the Committee) or in Wiltshire. Northumberland provides an instance of wages and stature both being exceptionally high, for Northumberland is only inferior to Durham as regards agricultural wages, and its natives are only inferior to those of the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire in stature. Unfortunately, the Report of the Anthropometric Committee groups a dozen counties in adjacent pairs, so that a comparison of the wage-curve and the stature-curve cannot be precise in these cases, but putting these and the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire (which are also reported on together) on one side, we find 14 single counties with a stature greater and 14 single counties or districts¹ with a stature less than the average for the whole of England. Of the counties of super-average stature, 8 have agricultural wages above the average, while 5 are below the average in wages and one (Cornwall) has a wage-figure which is precisely the same as the average for England as a whole. Of the counties of infra-average stature, 8 have wages below and 6 wages

¹ This includes the West Riding of Yorks (with Sheffield), Surrey (exclusive of London) and Gloucestershire (with Bristol), but excludes London.

above the average. And though, if we take an average of the average wage-rates of the members of each group of 14 counties, we find that the rate is higher in the group of super-average stature (namely 19s. 0 $\frac{1}{4}$ d. as compared with 18s. 1 $\frac{2}{7}$ d. in the other group), this contrast loses its decisive appearance if the 28 counties are divided into 4 groups according to stature. Then we get for the 7 counties of highest stature an average wage of 18s. 10d., for the next highest group a wage of 19s. 3 $\frac{4}{7}$ d., for the third group one of 17s. 8 $\frac{5}{7}$ d., and for the group of lowest stature a wage of 18s. 5 $\frac{5}{7}$ d. A similar result is obtained if we include the counties reported on in pairs by the Committee, assuming that the average stature is the same in each of the two members of every pair as in the pair taken together. Then, excluding London for obvious reasons, and Monmouth because in the Report on Agricultural Wages it is included in Wales, but counting each Riding of Yorkshire as a separate shire, we get 41 counties, which may be grouped as follows :—

No. of Counties.	Average Height of Shortest County of the Group	Average Wage ¹
	Inches	s. d.
10	67 82	18 10 $\frac{9}{10}$
10	67.29	19 3 $\frac{2}{10}$
10	66 75	17 10 $\frac{2}{10}$
11	66 27	18 2 $\frac{11}{7}$

Thus there is no true correspondence between the curve of stature and that of agricultural wages.

¹ These averages are unweighted : they are obtained simply by adding together the average wages of each county and dividing the total by the number of counties.

The Report of the Anthropometric Committee also gives the ratios of weight and height. And taking the average weight in lbs. per inch of stature we find that, of the counties or districts reported on singly, 17 are above the average in this particular and 10 below it, while the figure for one coincides with that of the average for England. The average wage-rate of the counties of super-average weight per inch of stature range from 16s. 6d. to 21s. 6d.: those of the counties of infra-average weight range from 17s. 1d. to 22s. The county of heaviest and that of lightest weight are both counties of super-average wages. Of the 17 counties of super-average weight, the 5 of greatest weight have an average wage of 18s. 3½d., while the average wage of the 5 which come next to them is 17s. 8½d. Of the 10 light-weight counties, the 5 lightest show an average wage of 18s. 9½d., while the other 5 show one of 20s. 1d. These facts are sufficient to prove that there is no correspondence between the variations in county wage-rates and those in weight per inch of stature as revealed by the Anthropometric Survey of 1883.¹

Another and more recent set of figures, which

¹ For all these anthropometric statistics *vide Report of the Anthropometric Committee to the Fifty-third Meeting of the British Association*, 1883, pp. 262-263. The value of the evidence is somewhat reduced by the fact that in some counties the average was obtained from a small number of observations—in Hereford and Monmouth together from only 23 and in 6 other cases from less than 75. In 24 cases, however, the average was obtained from over 100 observations, and in 13 of them from observations varying in number from 200 to 453. The wage-figures are taken from the Report for 1907 (Cd 5460), pp. 2-5. As regards weight, Staffordshire and Suffolk come fifth in the list, with equal weights per inch of stature; but, as the former county has the greater stature, I have in the text included it in the heaviest group of five and Suffolk in the second group. It might be better to take an average of the average wages of the two counties and credit each group with that average as the figure for one county. Then the average wage for the heaviest group would be 18s. 0½d., and for the next 17s. 11½d.

points, I think, to the same conclusions, is provided by the reports of School Medical Officers. These, of course, only refer to children, and it is not in every county that measurements are recorded, nor are the measurements which are recorded easily comparable in every case. At the same time the evidence that I have obtained from these reports is definitely opposed to the theory that agricultural wages vary with differences in stature and physique which are due to racial differences between the population of one shire and another. The following tables give the average heights and weights of boys aged 12 in certain counties where agricultural wages are peculiarly low and peculiarly high respectively. I give the figures for boys of 12 because an unusually large number seem to have been examined at that age.¹

I. COUNTIES WITH LOW AGRICULTURAL WAGES

County and Average Weekly Earnings (1907)	Year. ²	Number examined. ³	Average height in inches	Average weight in lbs.
Oxfordshire (16s. 4d.) .	1912	489	55.2	76
Dorset (16s. 6d.) .	1911	?	55.65	75.15
Wiltshire (16s. 9d.) .	1910	1668	54.9	73.2
Gloucestershire (17s. 1d.)	1911-1912	910	55.62	75.18
Cambridgeshire (17s. 2d.)	1911	420 (438)	55.25	75.75
Bedfordshire (17s. 5d.)	1912	869	55.12	73.37
Essex (17s. 7d.) .	1911-1912	6203	55.5	73.1
Somerset (17s. 8d.) .	1912	2246 (2242)	55.2	73.4
Hereford (17s. 11d.) .	1911	540	55.1	72.7

¹ The boys are described either as "Age 12," or "Age 12 last birthday," or "Age 12-13."

² Figures are given for the most recent year for which I have managed to obtain them, except in the case of Westmorland, where the average for 1912 was based on only 27 observations.

³ The figures in brackets are the numbers weighed where these differed from the numbers measured.

II. COUNTIES WITH HIGH AGRICULTURAL WAGES

County and Average Weekly Earnings (1907)	Year	Number examined	Average height in inches	Average weight in lbs
Derbyshire (20s. 2d) .	1912	3540	54.7	71.3
Westmorland (19s. 9d) .	1911	89	56.3	73.8
Cumberland (19s. 8d.) .	1911	154	55.9	75.8
Leicestershire (19s. 7d.) .	1912	1892?	55.41	74.13
East Sussex (18s. 9d. for Sussex)	1911	644	55.47	72.44
Holland } (18s. 9d. for	1911	367	55.2	74.5
Kesteven } Lincolnshire) .	1912	688	56.9	73.4
Shropshire (18s. 8d.) .	1911	1477	54.9	73.0
Warwickshire (18s. 5d.) .	1911	?	54.92	72.42

From these tables it appears that in the nine counties with low agricultural wages the average height of boys of 12 varies from 54.9 inches to 55.65 inches, and their average weight from 72.7 lbs. to 76 lbs., while in the nine counties or districts with high agricultural wages the height average varies from 54.7 inches to 56.3 inches and the weight average from 71.3 lbs. to 75.8 lbs. Only one out of the nine low-wage counties shows an average height for boys of 12 of less than 55 inches, but an average height less than this is found in three of the high-wage counties. In the low-wage group it is only in Herefordshire, which has the best wages of any in the group, that we find an average weight of less than 73 lbs.; but three of the high-wage counties—including Derbyshire where the wages are higher than in any other county of the group—show an average weight less even than that of Herefordshire. It is important to notice that the counties for which figures are given have not

been selected as striking cases. They are simply the counties for which I have managed to obtain comparable statistics. In the case of Durham, where, it will be remembered, agricultural wages are higher than elsewhere in England, I have not been able to procure figures comparable with those in the tables, for the Report of the School Medical Officer for that county does not give statistics with regard to boys of 12 years of age. The figures given for Durham are, however, comparable with those collected by Dr. Tuxford and Dr. Clegg for England and for the county areas in general, and Mr. T. Eustace Hill, the School Medical Officer for the County of Durham, reported in 1911 that "as in previous years, the heights and weights at most age periods of the children in this county compare unfavourably with the average of those for other county areas."¹ Thus the measurements of school children supply definite evidence against the view that the population of counties where agricultural wages are high belong to a race of superior physique.

Again, if craniometrical statistics can be regarded as giving an indication of racial distinctions or of differences in mentality, this kind of evidence also appears to condemn any explanation of the variations in agricultural wages which points to racial qualities as their cause. Mr. W. Z. Ripley notices the comparative invariability of the cranial type in the British Isles. "On the continent near by," he writes, "the range of variation of averages of cephalic index in a given country is never less

¹ *Vide Annual Report of the School Medical Officer to the County Council of Durham for 1911*, p. 11.

than ten points; in Italy and France it often runs from 75 to 88. Oftentimes within a few miles it will drop five or six units suddenly. Here in the British Isles it is practically uniform from end to end. Highland and lowland, city or country, peasant or philosopher, all are practically alike in respect of this fundamental racial characteristic."¹ The indices, he says, "all lie between 77 and 79, with the possible exception of the middle and western parts of Scotland, where they fall to 76."¹

On the whole, then, the evidence drives one to the opinion that the true cause of any inferiority in capacity which the agricultural labourers of the low-wage counties may exhibit—as distinct from defects in willingness or in the direction they receive from their employers—must be sought not in unalterable racial qualities but in the conditions of the men's environment. And, among such conditions, food is clearly the most important—the most certain and direct in its influence upon the bodily strength and working power of the individual. So far as capacity for hard physical toil goes, it is indisputably true, up to a certain point, that "der Mensch ist was er isst." And it is therefore all-important to notice the incontestable fact that the earnings of very many farm-labourers are insufficient to allow a family of moderate size to be maintained in a state of physical efficiency. The evidence on this point seems overwhelmingly strong.

The first witness is Mr. H. H. Mann,² who in the autumn of 1903 made a careful survey of economic

¹ Vide W. Z. Ripley, *The Races of Europe* (1900), p. 305.

² H. H. Mann, *Life in an Agricultural Village in England*, *Sociological Papers*, vol. i. (for 1904), 1905, pp. 161-193.

conditions in the village of Ridgmount in Bedfordshire. After making due allowance for the cost of living at Ridgmount and for the cheap cottages obtainable on the Duke of Bedford's estate, Mr. Mann, speaking of the condition of the agricultural labourers, comes to the conclusion "that a man earning the average rate of wages, and the head of a household, must descend below the primary poverty line so soon as he has two children, unless he is able to supplement his income by an allotment, by fattening and breeding pigs, or by other means," and "that he will remain below the poverty line until the eldest child leaves school and begins to earn money."¹ Secondly, even after full allowances are made for all subsidiary sources of income—such as allotments, poultry and pig keeping, charity, poor-relief, pensions, odd jobs, home-industries, and the money sent home by absent children—it appears that in the village of Ridgmount the families actually living in primary poverty were 31.5 per cent of the total number of families, or 38.5 per cent of the working-class families in the place, and that these families in primary poverty contained 34.3 per cent of the total population.² "Primary poverty" is defined by Mr. Mann as "that poverty caused by an insufficiency of earnings, even when most economically applied, to provide for physical efficiency," and the standard of food regarded as necessary is that taken by Mr. Seebohm Rowntree for his researches into social conditions in York.³ Ridg-

¹ *Vide op. cit.* pp. 192.

² *Vide ib.* p. 176 The average number in a household was 3.76 for the working-class population as a whole, and 4.00 for those in primary poverty.

³ *Vide ib.* pp. 166-167, 169

mount is described as a village of "purely agricultural character"; and it must be remembered that Bedfordshire, according to the Report of 1907, has an average agricultural wage better than that of nine other counties in England.

The second piece of evidence is that provided by Miss M. F. Davies with regard to the village of Corsley in Wiltshire.¹ In 1901 there were 824 inhabitants in Corsley, and 57.7 per cent of the heads of households were engaged in agriculture in the winter of 1905-1906, when Miss Davies's investigations were made.² Miss Davies adopts Mr. Rowntree's minimum standard of food and dress and the figures Mr. Mann uses for the necessary minimum of fuel and household sundries. On this basis Miss Davies found 28 households living in primary poverty in Corsley, and 16 of these were households of able-bodied labourers.³ Besides these, 37 households, 13 of them belonging to labourers, were in secondary poverty—that is, according to Miss Davies's definition, they had less than 1s. per head per week in excess of the necessary minimum. The families in primary poverty contained 57 adults and 87 children; those in secondary poverty, 80 adults and 48 children. Of 41 labourers' households which were living above the secondary poverty line only 13 contained any children under 14, and these 13 contained 47 adults to 20 children. The 13 labourers' families in secondary poverty consisted of 29 adults and 25 children. The 16 labourers' households in primary poverty contained 37 adults

¹ *Vide* M. F. Davies, *Life in an English Village*, 1909.

² *Vide ibid.* pp. 99, 105.

³ The class of "labourers" includes a few others besides farm-labourers. *Vide ibid.* p. 115.

and 76 children.¹ Thus if the labourers are grouped according to poverty, it appears that only in the group living in primary poverty did the children exceed the number of the adults. Though only one-eighth of the total number of households in Corsley were in primary poverty, these households contained two-fifths of the total number of children.²

Miss Davies writes that "with very few exceptions all agricultural wage-earners who have several children pass through a period of primary poverty, and the condition is characteristic of the class in Corsley, and not due to any avoidable fault of any particular family."³ The significance of these facts becomes clearer when it is noticed (i.) that agricultural wages in Wiltshire are higher than in 4 other English counties; (ii.) that Corsley appears on the whole to be comparatively a prosperous village; (iii.) that the income in relation to which poverty is determined by Miss Davies includes not only the earnings of every member of each household, including the women, but also the value of free beer, "though wages given as beer are not, as a matter of fact, available to contribute to the efficient nourishment of the family."⁴ An element of uncertainty is, however, introduced into Miss Davies's estimates by the fact that she does not count house-rent (which varies for cottages in Corsley from £3 to £6 a year) as part of the necessary expenses, nor count the value of garden-produce, nor any profit made out of an allotment or by pig-keeping, as part of the household's income. "Rent," writes Miss Davies, "is omitted, since practically every cottage in Corsley

¹ For these figures *vide op. cit.* pp. 138-150.

³ *Vide ibid.* p. 287.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 287.

⁴ *Vide ibid.* p. 138.

has a good garden, and the value of garden produce in some cases more than equals the rent. Probably, in an average case, rent and value of produce (including that consumed by the family) about balance."¹ When cottages are free their "value" is counted in the income of the household.²

The last set of facts bearing on the question of under-feeding are those collected by Mr. Seebohm Rowntree and Miss Kendall.³ In the first place, taking the same standard of necessary nutriment as that adopted in Mr. Rowntree's *Poverty*—a standard which, it is pointed out, is that considered by Professor Atwater to be the minimum for persons engaged in *moderate* work—and allowing only 2s. a week for house-rent, and nothing at all for tobacco, beer, or any other luxuries, these writers come to the conclusion that a family of five persons cannot maintain its members in bare physical efficiency, at the present cost of living, with an income which does not exceed 20s. 6d. a week.⁴ They point out that in the case of *ordinary* agricultural labourers, "with five exceptions (Northumberland, Durham, Westmorland, Lancashire, and Derbyshire), the average earnings in every county of England and

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 141. But this still leaves in doubt about any profit that may be made out of an allotment or by pig-keeping.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 138.

³ *Vide* B. Seebohm Rowntree and May Kendall, *How the Labourer Lives* (1913).

⁴ It is a pity that the authors did not push this inquiry further, and correlate their statements about the necessary minimum income with the cost of living in different rural districts. But if the statistics with regard to towns may be taken as typical of the geographical distribution of various prices zones, there seems no reason for supposing that the cost of living is specially low in those parts of England where agricultural wages are low. Food and coal prices are, it is true, lowest in the midland towns, but they are higher in the towns of the southern, eastern, and east-midland counties than in those of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Cheshire. *Vide Report on Working-Class Rents and Retail Prices in 1912* [Cd. 6955], p. xxxvii.

Wales are below" this necessary minimum income.¹ Secondly, Mr. Rowntree and Miss Kendall have made detailed investigations as to the food actually consumed in a typical week by the households of 42 agricultural labourers. Of these 42 households, 19 were in counties where the average rate of total earnings for all classes of agricultural labourers is in excess of the average rate for England as a whole. The households "selected for investigation were of good reputation for sobriety, thrift, and honesty," and families "with an abnormally large number of children were as a rule avoided."² Yet the conclusion reached after a study of the weekly budgets was that the average shortage of protein in the food obtained was 24 per cent, and that "on the average the forty-two families investigated are receiving not much more than three-fourths of the nourishment necessary for the maintenance of physical health."³

Several points remain to be noted with regard to these three sets of investigations and their results. In the first place, the dietary on the basis of which the minimum necessary income is determined is "more austere than that provided in any work-house in England or Wales."⁴ Secondly, no allowance is made for inefficient marketing or bad choice of foods, for the cost of such a simple luxury as

¹ *Vide op cit.* pp. 27-31. Mr Rowntree's conclusion, quoted above, seems to require some modification in view of the fact that he apparently estimates the necessary income on the basis of the present cost of living (*vide* p 27), but makes no allowance for the rise in wages since 1907. The wages of ordinary farm-labourers in England and Wales rose between 1907 and 1912 as from 102 to 104.9 (*vide Report of Land Enquiry*, vol 1. p 11); but even if we assume that the rise has continued as a slightly steeper curve since, and raise the figures of 1907 in the proportion of 102 to 106, we only add Cumberland, Middlesex, and the North and West Ridings of Yorkshire to the list of exceptions in England, though apparently some three counties should then be counted as exceptions in Wales.

² *Vide ibid.* p 38.

³ *Vide ibid.* pp. 303-304.

⁴ *Vide ibid.* p. 28

tobacco, or for the desire to keep up appearances which may cause money to be spent on dress or window curtains or the like to a greater extent than is "necessary."¹ It is obvious that factors such as these must produce under-feeding in many families where the income is considerably above the necessary minimum. Thirdly, the family for which the minimum income is set down as necessary is not a large one, including as it does only three children. Fourthly, it is clear that it is precisely in those families where the deficiency in food is greatest that it will affect the largest number of children. Fifthly, in so far as the earnings of the head of the household are supplemented by those of others or by the produce of a garden or allotment, this means (where the family is young) in the one case that the wife is working as a wage-earner, perhaps during the years of child-bearing and certainly when young children need her attention, and, in the other case, that the agricultural labourer puts in additional work in gardening, which is in itself a proof that he is capable of greater exertion than is accounted for by the work he performs for his master. Lastly, the evidence reveals the fact that neither supplementary wage-earning, nor the produce of gardens or allotments, nor charity, nor any other thing prevents the blight of "primary poverty" from settling upon a large proportion of the families of agricultural

¹ It should be noticed that increasing "temperance" does not necessarily lead to less under-feeding: it may be correlated with the use of other "luxuries" instead of beer—with the purchase of sweets for the children, or the taking in of a newspaper, and the provision of entertainment at home in the shape of a gramophone. Under-feeding does not necessarily mean hunger. At the same time a rise in wages accompanied by "speeding-up" would no doubt lead to better feeding. The harder work would surely make the wage-earner at least feel the need of more nutriment.

labourers. It is certainly possible that, in a family living in this condition, the wage-earner may be taking more than his share and may be adequately fed. But if this is so, the children must be even worse fed than they otherwise would be. In other words, the agricultural labourers in the low-wage shires must be underfed, either in childhood, or as adults, or possibly all along.

Against these conclusions one objection may possibly be urged. It may be suggested that under-feeding would reveal itself in height and weight, and that the statistical evidence collected above shows that the inhabitants of the shires where agricultural wages are low are not inferior to those of other counties so far as measurable physique goes. But this objection can be met. In the first place, the measurements given do not refer especially to agricultural labourers nor even exclusively to the rural population. Their witness was simply against the hypothesis that low agricultural wages are a result of a physical inferiority which can be traced to unalterable racial qualities in the general population of certain shires. Secondly, under-feeding can, as a matter of fact, go some way without affecting the measurements of the sufferers. Dr. Hill is explicit on this point. "If food does not contain as much protein as is needed," he writes, "the deficit is made up at the expense of the tissues. It does not follow that under these circumstances a man loses in weight. He may be putting on fat, although losing in strength owing to waste of muscle."¹ Again Sir William

¹ *Vide* Alex. Hill, *The Body at Work* (1908), p. 150. It will be remembered that the average shortage of protein in the family budgets of farm-labourers examined by Mr. Rowntree and Miss Kendall was 24 per cent. Only in 1 case of the 42 examined was the protein adequate: that case was

Osler tells me he considers that a degree of under-feeding insufficient to show itself in measurements might none the less be serious enough to reduce the capacity of a workman for hard physical toil. He regards it as legitimate to compare an underfed labourer to an engine on half steam.¹

It remains then incontestable that in a considerable number of English counties agricultural wages are so low and under-feeding so prevalent in the families of farm-labourers, that we can hardly fail to see in these facts the chief cause of that residuum of inefficiency which has not been previously explained.²

It is now possible to sum up the conclusions reached in this chapter. In the first place, there are good reasons for supposing that the cost of agricultural labour is especially low in the counties where agricultural wages are low. And in so far as this is the case, it is clear that wages must be raised more in those counties than elsewhere, if agriculture there is to be put on an equality, as regards expectations of profit, with the agriculture of the high-wage shires. On the other hand it appears probable that the variations in wages are not entirely due to

in Yorkshire—a county of high wages (*vide* Rowntree and Kendall, *op. cit.* pp. 302-303).

¹ This comparison is made by Dr. Robert Hutchison in his book on *Food and the Principles of Dietetics*, quoted by Rowntree and Kendall, *op. cit.* p. 306. Dr. Hutchison says: "The difference, in fact, between an animal fed on highly-nitrogenous diet and one supplied with little nitrogen is the difference between a steam-engine at half-pressure and one which is producing its full horse-power."

² Mr. A. D. Hall, without even restricting the application of his remarks to any particular districts, says: "The farmer's general complaint is that the majority of his men are not worth their wages, and that is very probably true; they will have to be more highly paid still before they will earn their money" (*vide op. cit.* p. 443). For some qualifications of the argument in the text *vide* Appendix III.

differences in the cost of labour, but should partly be attributed to differences in its efficiency. These differences in the efficiency of the workmen, however, may to some extent be regarded as produced by lack of hope or willingness, or by the unwise direction of labour in certain districts. And in so far as they are more deeply graven than this, they appear to be due not to inherent racial qualities, but to under-feeding, which a rise in wages would tend to prevent. In other words, the disease is curable.

CHAPTER IV

SOME PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AS TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF A RISE IN AGRICULTURAL WAGES WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

ONE of the first questions which the layman asks himself with regard to minimum wage regulation is whether it will cause unemployment or at least displacement of labour. This question has hardly been raised in the discussions of the last two chapters, and the problems connected with its answer are the most important which still remain to be considered.

1. These problems are more or less in evidence, from whatever point of view the question of a rise in agricultural wages is regarded, but there is one aspect of the general question so intimately bound up with the problems of the displacement of labour that, except for brief references in the earlier chapters, I have reserved it for consideration here. In the second chapter of this essay the main question considered was whether farm-labourers' wages had any special tendency to fall short of the product of their labour, while the discussions of the third chapter were chiefly concerned with an inquiry into the possibility of improvement in the efficiency of the workmen. But it was noticed that the value

of labour to an employer depends not only on the personal capacity of the workman but on the profitability of the tasks to which he is put, and it was argued that the substitution of abler employers for the less efficient might lead to a better direction and a more profitable use of the labour force. Labour might be transferred from the less profitable to the more profitable tasks. Now these considerations bring us to the threshold of another problem, which has hitherto been left on one side. The question arises whether the wealth of the nation—or rather, ultimately, whether human welfare,—might not be increased by a transference of labour from agriculture to other industries. Would the productiveness of the nation as a whole be increased by the restriction of agricultural operations? If the least remunerative, the least productive tasks now carried out by agricultural labourers were left undone, could more remunerative tasks be found in other industries for the individuals rendered unnecessary in the fields? Apart from all questions as to the possibility of raising the cost of labour in agriculture without making the industry unprofitable, and apart from any possibility of raising wages without raising the cost of labour, there remains the question whether a rise in wages which did bring about the cessation of the less profitable agricultural enterprises and did produce a reduction in the volume of agricultural employment, might not be a benefit to society. That the abandonment of the less remunerative tasks would enable the level of agricultural wages to be raised more than would otherwise be possible, and that the change could in all probability be induced by legislation prescribing

a sufficiently high minimum wage, is clear enough. But doubts gather thick and nebulous when we try to descry the shape and character of the ultimate results that would follow such a transference of national energy whether small or great.

At first sight, it appears by no means improbable that a restriction of agricultural enterprise would increase the wealth of the nation. It may very well be argued that there is a good deal of fixed capital in agriculture, that the conditions of rural labour hinder its mobility in flight to other employments, and that neither farmers nor their sons find it very easy to enter the world of urban business; while it cannot be doubted that these are factors which, so far as they are influential, must tend to accumulate productive resources in agriculture without close regard to the possibility that their employment in other industries might prove more remunerative. It may, too, be suggested that the great change in market conditions during the last thirty years has *compelled* so much restriction of agricultural enterprises that all reductions other than those which were necessary may have been put out of court by the awakening of a strong desire to keep things, so far as possible, as they were.¹ And, if I may illustrate the matter by a figure, the implication of these arguments is that the store of productive agents applied to agriculture is like the water in a stream which is dammed up. It cannot at once flow down to irrigate the meadows below the weir, but must form a pool before it can overflow the

¹ This argument may be compared with the one advanced in the second chapter, to the effect that the necessary expulsion of many rural labourers lessened the mobility of others in response to ambition.

weir, even though the water retained in that pool is not fulfilling any useful function. Productive energy in this view of things is retained in agriculture like the water in the pool, and is prevented from flowing into the most productive channels. A minimum wage, if fixed sufficiently high, would be like a pump used to drain the pool. Such is the theory.¹

On the other hand, there are strong arguments which suggest that there is no unhealthy concentration of capital and labour in agriculture, and therefore make against the opinion that a transference of energy from agriculture to other industries would lead to an increase in national wealth; and on the whole I think these arguments have the greater weight. The unorganised condition of agricultural credit in England, the traditions of the countryside which probably have withstood the growth of agricultural joint-stock companies, the impoverishment of landlords through agricultural depression, and the uncertainties attaching to compensation for tenants' improvements, are all factors which must have tended to obstruct the flow of capital *into* agriculture. Moreover, it may be doubted whether the arguments urged in the last paragraph are really

¹ In general, the problem considered in the text is closely akin to those problems of which Professor Pigou has recently made a special study. To use technical language, the question is whether the "marginal net product of resources," or, more particularly, whether the "marginal net product of labour" is less in agriculture than in other industries; and it is presumed that the national dividend and probably the sum of national welfare will be greatest if "the marginal net product of resources in different uses" is equal. In support of the theory that a reduction in agricultural employment would increase national wealth, it is therefore pertinent to quote Professor Pigou's opinion "that, other things being equal, in industries of increasing returns the marginal net product of investment tends to exceed, and in industries of diminishing returns to fall short of, the marginal net product yielded in industries in general."—*Vide* A. C. Pigou, *Wealth and Welfare* (1912), pp. 176-177.

so strong as at first sight appears. The great bulk of the fixed capital devoted to agriculture consists of buildings which belong to the landlords, and the tenant farmer undergoes no loss by their disuse. Of the capital owned by the entrepreneur a much greater part is "circulating," and therefore easily transferable, in the case of agriculture than in the case of manufacture. The farmer can dismiss many of his men without being obliged to scrap much costly machinery: hence he can easily transfer some of his circulating capital to other industries by the simple process of reducing his wages bill and investing in industrial companies. And a good part of the farmer's *fixed* capital is peculiarly mobile: many cart-horses could be transferred to other than agricultural uses.¹ Again, the effect of agricultural depression may have been far other than that suggested above. Instead of preventing all restrictions of agricultural operations except those which were unavoidable, the movement may have produced a panic of unnecessary retrenchment: it may have frightened capital away from agriculture to an unjustifiable extent.² Besides, on the hypothesis that productive agents are devoted to agriculture which might be employed more profitably elsewhere, it is hard to explain the chorus of expert testimony to the prevalence of under-cultivation.³ And at least it is clear that the recent recovery of the prices of agricultural products has tended to increase the profitableness of agricultural operations.

¹ Coal merchants, brewers, carriers, railway companies, and even the tramway companies, in Oxford and Cambridge at least, use horses that are not thorough-bred.

² Cp. *supra*, pp. 21-22.

³ I shall return to this subject later

A further point must be noticed. Even if it were certain that national wealth would be greater under a system in which a larger proportion of the nation's capital and labour was devoted to industry and a smaller proportion devoted to agriculture, it might none the less be the case that the cost of transition to such a condition from the existing state of things would more than outweigh the gain to be won from the increased product of the transferred agents. The process of change would almost certainly involve the permanent disuse of some, and the temporary disuse of other agents. Some farm buildings would be discarded, and some farm labourers would have to pass through a period of unemployment before finding work outside agriculture. In other words, the transference of productive agents could not be immediate or complete; and the loss caused by this fact must be taken into account in any judgment upon the policy of change.¹

And, finally, even if a net increase in national wealth would certainly result from such a change as is here contemplated, it would still remain debatable whether general welfare, as distinct from economic welfare, would have been increased. "Man does not live by bread alone": he is a social spirit, as well as a producer and consumer of economic goods. And in view of the facts (i.) that agriculture is carried on by people who live mainly in villages, and (ii.) that the towns draw and must draw (if the rural population continues to multiply and agriculture

¹ This point may perhaps be put more generally. In estimating the effect of a transference of productive agents from one industry to another it is obviously insufficient to compare merely the products of the transferred agents before and after the change. The products of any intransferable agents which are disused in consequence of the change must be added to the original products of the transferred agents before the comparison is made.

is inexpansive) a large number of immigrants from the villages, it may well be asked whether the restriction of agriculture would not have a disastrous social effect through the inevitable reduction in the population of the villages. If the villages are very small, will not intermarriage bring about a deterioration in the stock of the village people? Can a small hamlet provide so good a training in the virtues of social life as a village of some size? Will the labourers, though receiving better wages, be actually happier or develop a stronger and better humanity in a society thus reduced in bulk? Any one who has lived in a village must have felt how much the smaller amenities of social life, at least, are dependent on the number of persons in the village. For cricket or football you must have an eleven. To give interest and reality to a flower-show or to village sports, you must have a certain number of competitors in each class. The young labourer does not enjoy a village fair when there is "nobody about." How can a harvest festival be interesting when it only means "two or three" dotted about a large area of nearly empty pews in a church built to suit mediæval ideas of the dignity of worship? How can a choral society be successful in a hamlet where there is only one tenor who "knows his notes," and he develops laryngitis just before the annual concert? At the same time, one compensating circumstance must not be lost sight of. If to higher agricultural wages a Saturday's half-holiday were added, young farm labourers would be enabled to indulge in sport in a way they cannot do at present: the proportion of the village population able to take part regularly in games on a Saturday

afternoon would be very largely increased. And if the labourers had more leisure and could all afford to buy bicycles, the reduction in the size of villages would matter less, for it would become much easier for the inhabitants of different villages to combine for purposes of recreation or social intercourse.

On the whole, it seems to me probable that a deliberate transference of labour and capital from agriculture to other industries would tend to diminish rather than to increase the wealth of the nation, and that considerations other than economic strengthen the argument against such transference. But it must be admitted that the factors which make all the difference in a problem of the kind just considered, are extremely hard to balance, one against another; and I cannot hide from myself that the discussion in the preceding paragraphs leaves ample room for doubt, and to some minds will appear quite inconclusive. It does not, however, follow that practical action need be hesitating because of theoretical misgivings. Sometimes, it is not thoughtlessness, but wisdom to scorn the

craven scruple
Of thinking too precisely on the event.

In some situations "not argument but effort shall decide." For when the fog of uncertainty lies thickly about one, it is only by advancing that one can hope to discern in definite outline the dangers that lie ahead and the road between them. And in regard to the particular social problem under consideration, it is at least clear that the case for a transference of energy from agriculture to other industries is strong in proportion as the least

remunerative tasks now undertaken in agriculture fall short of the least remunerative tasks of other industries in productivity—if, indeed, they do fall short of them at all. But if a minimum wage, which was carefully calculated to assure to farm labourers a wage equal, in proportion to their capacity, to that received on an average in other industries, should cause the least productive tasks in agriculture to be discontinued, that fact would in itself be evidence that energy is at present devoted in agriculture to less remunerative tasks than those to which it might be applied in other industries. In other words—if I may put the case in a rough and ready way—one may almost venture to assert that a minimum wage, carefully devised on the principle mentioned above, will only bring about a transference of energy from agriculture to other employments, if it is, on economic grounds, a good thing for the nation that such a transference should take place.¹ And, at all events, it is quite clear that the present state of opinion makes the real danger, not that action will be too drastic, but that it will not be drastic enough. It is the rural exodus and the lamentable picture of a deserted village which have touched popular imagination and aroused the eloquence of politicians. There is no fear that State action will go too far in an effort to drive labour and capital from agriculture to other employments. That, on the contrary, there is a danger of the margin of production in agriculture being driven artificially lower than it should be, in comparison

¹ If it is urged that the weakness of farm labourers in bargaining, by keeping wages low, causes farmers to waste labour and to employ it on tasks which are only profitable because labour can be obtained at a low price, it may be replied that a minimum wage would clearly remedy such wastage.

with the margin in other industries, is indicated by the body of opinion in favour of agricultural protection.

2. From the question whether it would be advantageous deliberately to force labour to quit agriculture for other industries, the transition is easy to the question whether measures designed to raise wages would in fact also have the effect of reducing the volume of agricultural employment. It is often asked whether minimum wage regulation will produce unemployment. But that is really begging a question as well as asking one; for it is often tacitly assumed, when the question is put, that a reduction of the demand for a particular kind of labour necessarily means that men will be thrown out of work and will experience, for some time at any rate, the distress and anxiety of unemployment. In order to admit of closer scrutiny the problem must be divided, and we must ask separately (*a*) whether minimum wage regulation in agriculture will, in fact, tend to reduce the volume of agricultural employment; (*b*) whether any measure can be devised to counteract such a tendency if it does follow from a compulsory rise in wages; and (*c*) whether, if the tendency does to any degree overmaster all counter-acting forces, it is certain to plunge men in the distresses of actual unemployment.

(*a*) In the first place, in so far as labour is really cheaper in agriculture than in other trades—that is to say, in so far as the earnings of farm labourers fall short of the product of their labour by a greater amount than the earnings of other workers fall short of their product—it is clear that no reduction in the volume of agricultural employment need result from a

compulsory rise in the wages of farm labourers which did no more than equate the cost of labour in agriculture with that of other trades.¹ Such a rise in wages would destroy a privilege that had previously been enjoyed either by the landlord or by the farmer, and would no doubt mean either a reduction in rent or a reduction in the profits of farming. But it would leave the agricultural entrepreneur with expectations of profit equal to those of other entrepreneurs. And it will be remembered that the arguments of the preceding chapters tended to show that the cost of labour is in fact low in British agriculture generally, and especially low in the case of the farm labourers of the low-wage counties. At the same time it is quite possible that a reduction in the volume of employment might follow as an indirect result from a rise in agricultural wages even under these conditions. The removal of the privilege of cheap labour would tend to drive out of business the farmers of least efficiency; and their place could only be taken by more efficient men. But possibly an improvement in farming methods might take the form of a more extended use of labour-saving machinery. On the other hand, it is equally possible that it might mean "higher" farming than that of the superseded farmers.²

¹ I have put the matter in the text in rough, untechnical language which is liable to a charge of inexactness. By speaking of agricultural labour as "cheap," I mean that it is "cheap" if the wages paid fall short of the *marginal net product* of the labour by a greater amount than the wages of other kinds of labour.

² Mr A. D. Hall appears to regard both contingencies as possible. On the one hand he writes "Men have left the land because fewer men have been needed per acre with every introduction of machinery, and indeed it is the better ideal to be able to manage a farm with two men per 100 acres minding machines and earning 30s. a week each than with ten men digging or its equivalent at 10s. a week each. Actually the contrast is not so bad as that, but still many farmers waste manual labour because it is com-

A different set of considerations emerge when a rise in wages produces or is accompanied by an improvement in the industrial quality of the farm labourers. Such an improvement must be either exactly proportional to the rise in wages or more than proportional or less than proportional to it. If it is exactly proportional, the cost of labour will remain unchanged, and landlords and farmers will be in the same position as before. But though the cost of an artificial unit of labour will not have increased, the cost of hiring a labourer will. And though it will be profitable to employ the same labour force as before the rise in wages, it will not be profitable to employ so many men. A labour force equivalent to that previously employed will be put forth by a smaller number of individuals. If other things remain as they were and the only changes have been a rise in wages and a proportional increase in the personal efficiency of the men, it will not pay to cultivate the land more intensively or to raise bigger crops, but fewer men than before will be required to raise crops equal to those previously produced. It follows that men will be discharged. And so long as the improvement in the industrial quality of the workman remains precisely proportionate to the rise in wages, the greater the rise in wages, the larger will be the number of men displaced. Whether the sum of human welfare would be increased by such a change depends to a great extent upon the question—to be considered later—whether the displacement of labour would

paratively cheap" On the other hand, after speaking of large farms where "low farming" obtains, he says that "with better prices and with the openings that have been found for specialized agriculture the need for such prauue farming is past"—*Vide op cit* pp 439, 445

actually involve distressful unemployment. But in the second place it is theoretically possible—and according to Mr. A. D. Hall it would appear actually probable¹—that a rise in wages will be followed, in some districts at least, by a more than proportional improvement in the personal efficiency of the labourers. Then the cost of labour will have declined, though wages have risen. It will then be profitable to raise larger crops than before. It is true that fewer men will be able to raise those crops than would have been required to raise similar crops before the improvement in the efficiency of the labourers took place; but, as the crops are larger, it does not necessarily follow that the men employed will be fewer than before the change. Two things indeed are clear. With a given rise in wages, there will be a tendency for more men to be employed when there is a more than proportional improvement in their efficiency, than when the improvement is strictly proportional. And the number of men employed, when the improvement in efficiency is more than proportional to the rise in wages, will depend not on the amount of the rise in wages, but on the degree to which the cost of labour has fallen—or, in other words, on the amount by which the improvement in the efficiency of the labourers is more than proportional to the rise in wages. Thirdly, there is the case of a rise in agricultural wages followed by an increase in the efficiency of the workmen which is *less* than proportional to the rise in wages. In this case the cost of labour will

¹ This is, I think, a fair deduction from his remark already quoted to the effect that farm labourers “will have to be more highly paid still before they will earn their money”; *vide op. cit.* p. 443.

have been increased to the employer, and unless the cost of labour was previously low in comparison with that of other trades—a condition of affairs which has already been considered—it follows not only that fewer men will do a given amount of work, but that a smaller amount of work will be done. The less remunerative agricultural tasks will be abandoned, land will be less intensively cultivated, rents will tend to go down, and men will be dismissed. These consequences, however, would not necessarily be evils. The case may be similar to that dealt with at the beginning of this chapter. More remunerative tasks than those abandoned may be available for the discharged farm labourers in other industries, and, if so, an increase of national wealth may be the ultimate effect of the change.¹ But in any case, as was previously pointed out, changes of this sort can only be set down definitely as good or evil, if due

¹ It seems possible to argue that wealth, if not welfare, might be increased, even though the dismissed men could only find in other industries tasks *less* remunerative than those which they had previously performed in agriculture. For the loss caused by the decline in their productivity might be outweighed by the increased productivity of those who remained in agricultural employment, since these, *ex hypothesi*, have become more efficient owing to better wages and better food. For example, if a farm labourers produce goods value x and b farm labourers produce goods value y , and a rise in agricultural wages leads to the dismissal of b men and to their subsequent employment in some other trade where they can only produce goods value $y - n$, it seems that when the rise in wages also leads to better feeding of the a men still employed in agriculture, so that their increased efficiency now enables them to produce goods value $x + m$, the wealth of the nation will have increased so long as $m > n$. Such considerations as these, however, soon lead one into a region of useless refinements and unprofitable doubt. It would obviously be necessary to carry the analysis much further, and to consider, for example, (i.) whether the advent of the discharged farm labourers into other trades produced any change in wages and in personal efficiency among the men already employed in those trades, and (ii.) whether the wealth which provides higher wages and produces improved efficiency in the case of the labourers retained in agriculture might not cause still greater improvement if employed elsewhere. The problem raises, too, the whole question with which Professor Pigou has wrestled in his book on *Wealth and Welfare*—the question whether an equalisation of “the marginal net products of resources” in different uses does or does not tend to the maximisation of wealth.

consideration is given not merely to the relative productivity of resources before and after the changes have taken place, but to the cost of transition and to the character of resultant social, as distinct from economic transformations.

I have now considered the effect on the volume of agricultural employment of increases in wages which either (i.) tended to equate the productivity of effort in agriculture and other trades, or (ii.) tended to equate the cost of labour in agriculture and other trades, or (iii.) led to an improvement in the efficiency of agricultural labourers. The case of a rise in agricultural wages which did none of these things need not detain us long. It may be presumed, I think, that it would both reduce the national dividend and cause men to be dismissed.

(δ) The next point to be considered is the question whether any forces or changes may be expected to counteract such tendencies towards a reduction in the volume of agricultural employment as do appear likely to result from minimum wage regulation. *

In popular discussion a reduction in the rent which he pays the landlord is commonly supposed to remove all difficulties which may beset the farmer as a result of a compulsory rise in wages. Instead of dismissing men, it is said, he will demand and secure a reduction of rent, and all will be well for all persons except the landlord.¹

But the matter is not really so simple as this. Three distinct cases at least must be distinguished. (i.) In the first place, where the farmer has made full use of the advantage accruing to him through

¹ For arguments to this effect *vide Report of the Land Enquiry*, vol. i. pp. 60-65.

the low price of agricultural labour,—employing labour on all tasks on which it can be profitably employed with wages at their present level,—and where the advantage or part of the advantage has been paid over to the landlord in the form of rent, then a reduction in the price paid for the hire of the land, if such a reduction is induced by an increase in the cost of labour, may very well be in reality a lowering of rent in the strict Ricardian sense of that term. In this case, however, the reduction of rent will not be an alternative to the dismissal of men, but a concomitant of it. The low-priced labour was *ex hypothesi* employed on tasks which it was only profitable to undertake because of its low price, and the fall of rent will have been caused by a rise in the cost of labour and the consequent need of discontinuing the less remunerative agricultural operations. The Ricardian rent will have declined, because of a rise in the margin of cultivation—because it will no longer pay to till the land as intensively as before. And this change will necessarily be accompanied by a reduction in the number of men employed on the land. (ii.) Secondly, there is the case which, in the previous discussion, has, I think, gradually emerged as one, in all probability, of frequent occurrence in actual practice. This is the case where the *dearest* labour which the farmer employs—the labour, that is to say, which he employs on the least remunerative of the tasks which he undertakes—is nevertheless peculiarly cheap. In such a condition of things, as I have already repeatedly urged, an increase in the cost of labour need not produce any decline in the number of men employed. But it is important to notice

the underlying assumption of this case. When labour is cheap in this sense—when, that is to say, the labour of the marginal man is cheap by comparison with other trades—the assumption is that production or the use of labour in preference to other agents of production has not been carried down to so low a margin as would in fact be profitable with wages at the given level and the labourers of the given capacity.¹ But this means that the farmers are not getting so much out of the land as they might or are not getting it by the cheapest means; and since this is an indication of inefficiency on the part of the farmers, it seems more probable that the advantage of the cheap labour is going to inefficient farmers concealed, so to say, in the form of opportunities for idleness or unintelligent management, than that it has aroused competition for the use of land and has been in consequence transferred to the landlord in the shape of rent. Now if this is so, it follows, I think, that a rise in wages which removed the semi-monopolistic privilege of employing cheap labour need not cause any reduction in the number of men employed and would not place an unfair burden upon the farmers; but that the burden would be felt severely by inefficient farmers who were incapable of adapting their methods to the new labour conditions, and especi-

¹ The opinions expressed in the text both as to the probable occurrence of this case and as to its implications appear to be shared by Professor Pigou, though I may say that my argument was constructed before I had the opportunity of reading his article on "A Minimum Wage for Agriculture." In that article Prof. Pigou writes: "Under present arrangements some groups of farmers are unconsciously playing the part of a ring of monopolists, paying their work-people less than the value of the marginal net product of their work, and holding away from agriculture labour that might with great advantage to the whole community be employed there."—*Vide The Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1913, p. 1176.

ally by those whom the shelter of the privilege referred to had alone protected from bankruptcy. But if these men were given the right to demand a reduction of rent, the nature of such a reduction in their case is clear enough. It would be a bounty given to secure the continuance of inefficient methods. The landlord would be taxed in order that his land might be farmed badly. The semi-monopolistic privilege of employing cheap labour would be replaced by another privilege of an equally monopolistic character—that of using peculiarly cheap land.¹ (iii.) The third case to be considered is that of a reduction in the rent paid to the landlord which has the effect of removing a necessity to dismiss men; so that a rise in the cost of labour which otherwise would necessarily cause a reduction in the number of men employed need no longer have that effect. This case differs from the first case considered, not only in that the reduction of rent would here prevent dismissals, but in the very nature of that reduction. The change would not be a fall in Ricardian rent at all, but a transference of part of the Ricardian rent directly to the farmer and indirectly to the labourers. The difference between this case and the second lies simply in the fact that here the transference of rent is necessary to prevent the displacement of labour, whereas in that considered above it was not necessary for that purpose. It does not, however, follow that such a transference would be an unquestionable advantage.

¹ I think I am justified in regarding this danger as a real one, in view of the proposal of the Land Enquiry Committee "that it should be laid down as an essential feature of any legislation dealing with the minimum wage, that a farmer who is able to prove that the rise in wages has put upon him an increased burden should have the right to apply to a judicial body such as a Land Court, for a readjustment of his rent."—*Vide op. cit.* p. 67.

On the face of it, the reduction in the sum paid by the tenant-farmer to the landlord will enable, but it will not in itself compel him to employ as many men as before. And even if legislation is so devised that the reduction of rent really benefits the pockets of the labourers, and if the number of men employed is in consequence of that reduction not affected by minimum wage regulation, there is still room for doubt as to the ultimate effect of the process. At all events its character must be kept clearly in view. This kind of change means really that the labourers are made into partners of the landlord. It means that, hidden in the form of wages, they receive part of the Ricardian rent of the land on which they work. They will be kept in employment even if the value of their work is less than that of the wages they receive. The position of an agricultural labourer will be, therefore, especially privileged. To put the matter in another way, the proposal is economically equivalent to a tax upon rent to provide a grant in aid of wages, though it is true that the natural tendency of such a grant to lower wages will be prevented by the legal minimum wage. On economic grounds, the objections to this scheme seem to me extremely grave. It must tend to bind labour to tasks of low productivity, to hamper mobility, to stereotype bad conditions. It can only be defended, if defended at all, either on the ground that it is socially all-important to retain a considerable population on the land, or else as a merely temporary measure designed to tide over the time until better feeding has improved the industrial quality of the agricultural labourers. Now if it is a temporary measure, it will not in the long

run prevent a reduction in the number of labourers employed, unless the improvement in the industrial quality of the labourers resulting from better feeding, proves to be more than proportionate to the rise in wages; for if the improvement is strictly proportionate or less than proportionate to the increase in wages, a reduction in the number of agricultural labourers is, *ceteris paribus*, to be expected, as I have tried to show above. And in any case, if the policy is to be adopted at all, it may very well be argued that it had better take a different form. If the minimum wage were fixed lower and landlords were then openly taxed to provide a grant in aid of the wages paid on their estates, the real nature of the proposal would at least be clear and a *transference* of rent would not masquerade as a *reduction* of rent.¹

On the whole, then, it seems that there is little to be hoped for from the policy of reducing rents as a means towards the prevention of labour-displacement. Where an agricultural minimum wage proves so serious a burden to the farmer that agricultural operations are necessarily contracted, it is clear that Ricardian rent will fall, and a corresponding reduction in the rent paid by the tenant to his landlord is in that case only fair, if the farm has not previously been under-rented. To secure a fair readjustment in such a condition of things would be legitimate work for a Land Court. But if the Land Court's action goes further than this—if it prevents the displacement of labour by its reduction of the price

¹ The nature of the proposal is clearly exposed by Prof. Pigou, who says: "This scheme, if literally carried out, would mean, in effect, the levying of a tax upon landlords and the employment of the proceeds as an addition to the pay of the existing force of agricultural labourers."—*Vide Nineteenth Century*, Dec. 1913, p. 1181.

which the tenant pays for the hire of his land—it follows, from the fact that a reduction sufficient for that end must involve a transference of Ricardian rent to the labourers, that very real disadvantages will result. And if it be held that the good results of the policy will outweigh the bad, the democratic principle that the real nature of legislation should be made as apparent as possible, requires that the policy shall be undisguised and shall be moulded in the form of a tax on rent destined to supplement a minimum wage that is not high enough to cause displacement of labour.

Besides a reduction in rent, there is another “royal road” out of any difficulties tending to a displacement of labour which may be produced by a rise in agricultural wages. But the merits or demerits of agricultural protection have been so much discussed in the last few years, that it is hardly necessary to debate them afresh in this connection. I will only observe that agricultural protection would certainly increase the volume of agricultural employment, but that this result would be attained at the cost of a greater diminution of employment elsewhere. Effort would be given to tasks of low productivity in agriculture instead of to tasks of high productivity in other industries. The wealth of the nation as a whole would be diminished. And if it could be proved that such a result would be beneficial—that social advantages would outweigh the economic loss—it might still be replied that there are more ways than one, both of enriching landlords at the expense of the community and of increasing agricultural employment, and that the end desired could be attained more frankly,

certainly and directly, without any manipulation of the tariff, by a system of bounties to agriculture.

If there is little or nothing to be gained, on the one hand, from a reduction of rents, or, on the other hand, from a protective tariff which would cause rents to rise, there are none the less other possible preventives of labour-displacement, the importance of which cannot be measured by the slight appeal they have made to popular imagination.

In Belgium 72 males are engaged in agriculture per square mile of cultivated land, while in England and Wales the number in 1901 was only 28.¹ Mr. R. J. Thompson, writing in 1906, says that in Denmark 73 persons are engaged in agriculture per 1000 acres under crops and grass, while in England and Wales the corresponding number is 36.² Now it seems impossible to suppose that these enormous differences are due to the inferiority of Britain in regard to soil, climate, or markets. Sir H. Rider Haggard says that "considered from an agricultural point of view, the British Isles far surpass Denmark in natural advantages,"³ while Mr. Seebohm Rowntree speaks of the "comparatively poor soil" of Belgium, and describes its climate as "no better than that of Britain."⁴ Again, Mr. Rowntree, in comparing English and Belgian conditions, remarks that the prices of food-stuffs "are very similar in the two countries," and notices that, though Belgium imposes no protective duty on wheat, the average yield of wheat per acre in the years 1900-1904 was 33½

¹ *Vide* Rowntree v. Kendall, *op. cit.* p. 17.

² *Vide* *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1906, p. 380

³ *Vide* H. Rider Haggard, *Rural Denmark and its Lessons* (new edition, 1913), p. 174

⁴ *Vide* B. Seebohm Rowntree, *Land and Labour Lessons from Belgium* (2nd edition, 1911), p. 187.

bushels as compared with 29.7 bushels in England.¹ As regards the tariff of Belgium, it should be noticed that, among cereals, wheat, meslin, rye, maize, buckwheat, barley, pearled barley, bran, and bread are duty free.² Denmark is even more definitely attached to the policy of the free import of agricultural products.³

It is of course impossible to draw sweeping conclusions from a mere comparison between the conditions of English agriculture on the one hand, and those of Belgian and Danish agriculture on the other, for the comparison must be based on statistical evidence, and such evidence cannot tell us everything that is germane to the problem. At the least, one would require definite knowledge of the standards of living prevalent among the peasantry of the three countries before a practical judgment could be pronounced. On the face of things, it might be argued that the Belgians and Danes push agricultural enterprise too far, and that they would be wiser if they devoted a greater proportion of their productive resources to urban industry. But in fact the contrast between the numbers employed in their fields and those employed in the fields of England is so enormous that even the most insular of optimistic

¹ *Vide Land and Labour*, pp 178, 186. The figures as to yield, moreover, do not reveal the whole truth. Mr. Christopher Turnor, speaking at the Farmers' Club in 1910, said: "When you see the high yield per acre that stands to England's credit, you must remember that these Blue Books do not show that on the Continent the thrifty cultivators of the soil till every description of land—land which in this country would not be cultivated at all—and that therefore their average is pulled down."—*Vide Report of Land Enquiry* (vol. 1.), p. 232.

² *Vide Diplomatic and Consular Report on the Customs Tariff of Belgium* (1904), Cd. 1767-16, p. 7.

³ Corn and farinaceous produce, animals alive or dead (with a very few exceptions, *e.g.* turtles), and butter (except in hermetically sealed receptacles), are among the goods duty free in Denmark. *Vide Translation of the New Customs Tariff*, 1908, Cd. 4267 *passim*.

patriots will hardly venture to explain it entirely on the hypothesis that foreigners are stupid and physically feeble. Such an explanation appears all the more ridiculous when it is remembered (i.) that many agricultural experts testify to the prevalence of under-cultivation in England, (ii.) that removable factors tending to produce this under-cultivation are undoubtedly at work here, and (iii.) that some of these factors are not to be found in Belgium and Denmark.

That a great deal of English land is under-cultivated seems clear beyond the shadow of a doubt. Sir H. Rider Haggard, speaking of England, says: "There are thousands of acres now rented that do not yield much more than one-half of what they ought to do."¹ Again, Mr. R. E. Prothero expresses the opinion that "thousands of acres of tillage and grass-land are comparatively wasted, underfarmed, and undermanned"; and he observes that "much ought to be done, which is left undone, to put land to its most profitable use and to adapt its equipment to the requirements of diversified farming."² In the Official Report on Small Holdings for 1910 it is stated that "a considerable quantity of the soil of the country might be made to return at least twice as much as it does at present," and that "if the results of scientific research can be brought home to the agricultural community, there is no reason why this result should not be achieved."³ Professor W. G. S. Adams, writing in 1907, says "there is room for great

¹ *Vide Rural Denmark* (1913), p. 252.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 401.

³ *Vide Cd. 5615* (part 1.), p. 25, quoted in *Report of the Land Enquiry* (vol. i.), p. 237.

improvement in the butter production of the United Kingdom," and that "the output of eggs in the United Kingdom could be enormously increased."¹ Mr. A. D. Hall, whose opinions I have already quoted more than once, says "there are many large farmers who never attempt to get the *maximum* profitable yield out of their land, but trust to skimming a small return off a wide area."² Again, speaking of his agricultural tour in 1910, he writes: "In every district we visited we found good and bad farmers close together, men who are earning good incomes on one side of the hedge, and on the other men who are always in difficulties, who in many cases are only kept going through the tolerance of their landlords." "Sometimes," he adds, "a man always manages to scrape his rent together, but he lives miserably, his farm is an eyesore and a source of weeds and infection to his neighbours."³ And, summing up the results of his three years' observations in 1913, Mr. Hall states again that "bad business habits and slipshod management are far too common,"⁴ that "in the arable counties cases are to be found of men in occupation of several thousand acres often in scattered farms," and that "this vast acreage they cultivate almost as cheaply and as scantily as a colonial farmer would," though in fact "the need for such prairie farming is past."⁵ Even in the case of well-managed farms of from 150 to 500 acres, Mr. Hall admits that improvements, "sometimes in the order of 5 or 10 per cent," are possible in several directions.⁶ Then there is the very

¹ *Vide* "Considerations relating to the Position of the Small Holding," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1907, pp. 427-428.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 149.

³ *Vide ibid.* p. 150.

⁴ *Vide ibid.* p. 431.

⁵ *Vide ibid.* p. 438-439.

⁶ *Vide ibid.* pp. 439-440.

interesting evidence presented by Mr. E. G. Strutt in his Presidential Address to the Surveyors' Institution, which was read on November 11, 1912. Mr. Strutt deals directly with the difficulty that, unless more work can be provided, and thereby "an increased demand for labour in country districts set up, any substantial rise in wages would mean the employment of less workmen on the land."¹ He quotes Mr. Rew's opinion as to the great displacement of agricultural labour which took place in the period 1881-1901 as a result of the conversion of arable to pasture, and urges that "one of the most effective ways of increasing the agricultural population would be to reconvert a considerable portion of these inferior pasture lands to their original use, which is that for which they are best fitted." "It is probable," he says, "that a large proportion of the second-class grass lands of the south and east of England, and perhaps some of the east Midlands, could be reconverted into arable with considerable profit to those engaged in their cultivation."² In support of these views Mr. Strutt points to the accounts kept on an estate in the east of England during the last eighteen years. The estate contains "two farms of roughly 2000 acres, of which about three-fifths are arable and two-fifths pasture," and the field accounts show that "the net annual profit from the arable land over the whole eighteen years has been £2 : 1 : 7 per acre, and from the grass land during the same period 7s. 11d.," while "during the

¹ *Vide Transactions of the Surveyors' Institution*, vol. xlv. part i. p. 5.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 6. In connection with Mr. Strutt's opinion as to the profitableness of arable farming, it is interesting to notice that in 1912 there was an extension of the area under plough in England and Wales by no less than 36,000 acres; *vide Agricultural Statistics, 1912*, Cd. 6597, p. 6

last six years, with the prices of all agricultural produce increased, results from the arable land were £2 : 14 : 9 per acre, and from the grass land 6s. 6d." Mr. Strutt calls attention to the fact that "the wheat crop . . . has proved itself the most profitable," and refers to a paper by Mr. Christopher Turnor, "who believes we could produce at a profit one-half the wheat we consume instead of one-fifth as at present."¹

It is hardly necessary to gather any further evidence of the prevalence of under-cultivation or mis-cultivation. The evil is notorious and has already attracted the attention of politicians of various schools. In the pamphlet entitled *A Unionist Agricultural Policy* it is remarked that "in every district there are farms which are not paying anything like so well as they might be made to pay if modern knowledge of cropping, administration, and machinery were supplied."² In the Report of the Liberal Land Enquiry Committee there is a large mass of information on the subject, and the conclusion of the Report is that while "in some parts of the country the land is undoubtedly put to its very best use at the present time," there are other districts in which "it is seriously under-cultivated."³ Some members of the Labour Party have gone so far as to introduce a most drastic Bill with the express object of dealing with under-cultivation.⁴

¹ *Vide* E. G. Strutt, *op. cit.* pp. 7 10

² *Vide A Unionist Agricultural Policy*, by a group of Unionists (1913), p. 19; *cp. ibid.* p. 13.

³ *Vide Report of Land Enquiry* (vol. 1.), p. 250, and for the evidence, pp. 230 249.

⁴ *Vide* A Bill to promote the better cultivation and the compulsory acquisition of Land, presented by Mr. William Thorne (Aug. 4, 1913), Bill 300.

A further problem now claims attention. Admitted that much English land is cultivated less intensively than it might be, it remains to be asked, What are the causes of this condition of things? And I think it can be shown that among those causes there are certain removable factors, some of which are absent in the case of Belgium and Denmark and may, therefore, help to explain the comparatively small number of persons employed per-acre in English agriculture.

(i.) In the first place, the possibility of an improvement in the personnel of the English farming class has already been considered in a previous chapter. I will only add here that Mr. Strutt hints that English landowners "have, perhaps, been too generous and easy-going to their tenants, and have for the sake of personal feelings allowed old tenants to continue in their occupations when they were unable to do justice to the capabilities of the soil, and unwilling to adopt more modern methods."¹ This at least corroborates the remark of Mr. A. D. Hall, which I have already quoted, that many bad farmers "are only kept going through the tolerance of their landlords."

(ii.) Next, it must be noticed that there are serious defects in the education of the English farmers; and an improvement in this is especially to be desired if the new generation is to lead the way to agricultural reform. The educational problem is, however, frequently misunderstood, and the need for better education is commonly confused with a quite different need—that for a better diffusion of expert agricultural knowledge.

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 30.

Mr. A. D. Hall has many words of wisdom on his subject. He considers that "the average British farmer is not educated up to his position or his opportunities," but, he adds, "it is not so much technical education that is lacking as an awakening to ideas, and that, probably, is more likely to come in the next generation from the general tuning-up of the country grammar schools than from the growth of agricultural colleges."¹ It is in defects of general education, and especially in the "lack of appreciation of general ideas," that Mr. Hall sees one reason among others for the inferiority of the general level of farming in England compared with that which obtains in Scotland; and here too it seems we have an explanation of the hide-bound routine of English methods and of the unresponsiveness of the British agriculturist to any co-operative schemes."² In a later chapter of his book, the same writer again presses the same moral. "What the ordinary farmer needs above all things," he says, "is better education; and by this we mean not so much additional knowledge of a technical sort, but the flexible habit of mind that comes with reading, the susceptibility to ideas that is acquired from acquaintance with a different atmosphere than the one in which he ordinarily lives."³ On another page he suggests "that this lack of intelligence, of respect for the things of the mind and the bearing they have on practical life" is "answerable for most of the deficiencies that can be justly charged against our farming."⁴ And again he says: "If we can only create that

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 152.

³ *Vide ibid.* p. 440.

² *Vide ibid.* pp. 151-152.

⁴ *Vide ibid.* p. 441.

respect for the things of the mind which so markedly characterises the Scandinavian agricultural community, to take perhaps the most striking example available, the British farmer need never fear the competition of the new countries."¹

(iii.) Thirdly, there is the distinct but closely connected question of the spread of scientific information. Granted that the chief obstacle is the stolid indifference of the farmer, it is none the less clear that the machinery for the diffusion of scientific knowledge in agricultural matters could with advantage be enormously improved. "In one technical detail, also," says Mr. Hall, "the British farmer's education is defective: he has never learnt a system of book-keeping adapted to the farm, a system which will show him the profit and loss on each branch of his business—cattle-raising, milk-producing, crop-growing—instead of merely his indebtedness or otherwise to A, B, and C with whom he trades."² But apart from a definite deficiency like this, there is indisputably need for efficient and accredited means of spreading the latest news about agricultural discoveries, and still more need for means of demonstrating their usefulness. Mr. Strutt, after speaking of the leaflets distributed by the Board of Agriculture, says: "At present I fear that the leaflets in the majority of cases fail to reach the people who are actually responsible for the working of the land."³ At any rate, Belgium seems to have outstripped us in this direction, with her fine staff of Government instructors or *agronomes*. "There is no doubt," writes Mr.

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 152.

³ *Vide op. cit.* p. 19.

Rowntree, "that the work of the *agronomes* is increasing the knowledge of agriculture and improving its methods throughout Belgium . . . and through their agency the latest information with regard to scientific farming is being brought home to many small holders."¹ With regard to our English needs there are some very valuable remarks in the pamphlet on *Unionist Agricultural Policy* already quoted. "Instruction for the adult agriculturist," say the writers of the pamphlet, "must . . . be developed in every direction. . . . Demonstration farms could, and must, be made to play a very important part in such education. The demonstration farm is an institution distinct from the experimental farm. The latter is a purely scientific institution for the development of agricultural knowledge. The former is intended to supply a full demonstration of scientific and up-to-date methods applied on a commercial scale at a farm of reasonable size. . . . Such farms may also be utilised as instructional or apprenticeship farms for the training of promising labourers' sons of fourteen to eighteen years old, as is being done to-day by the Government of New South Wales. There is no reason why such a farm should not be within reach of every farmer in England."² It is true that these suggestions are now, as practical proposals, a little out of date, for the Development Commissioners have already elaborated a scheme for the establishment of a system of "farm institutes," and are making a grant of £325,000 for this purpose.³ But the work is only beginning, and all

¹ *Vide Land and Labour* (1911), p. 222

² *Vide op. cit.*, pp. 19-20.

³ *Vide Report of the Land Enquiry*, pp. 440-441.

that I am concerned to prove is the possibility of a real improvement on the conditions of the past.

(iv.) Closely connected with the lack of general education is the backwardness of England in agricultural co-operation and co-operative agricultural credit. Here undoubtedly we have one reason for the contrast between English agriculture on the one hand, and that of Belgium and Denmark on the other. "Whatever else may be doubtful or open to argument in connection with Danish agriculture," writes Sir H. Rider Haggard, "one thing remains clear, namely, that it owes the greater part of such prosperity as it possesses to the working of the co-operative movement."¹ As regards Belgium, it is sufficient to remark that, according to Mr. Cahill's Report to the Board of Agriculture, there are 55 agricultural co-operative societies in Belgium for every 10,000 persons engaged in agriculture, while in Denmark the corresponding number is 23, and in Great Britain 3 only.² Nor does there seem any reason for supposing that this contrast is due to any insurmountable obstacles presented by British national character. Mr. C. R. Fay has pointed out that co-operative production in agriculture only began in England in 1900, while Denmark started in 1882, and Belgium in 1889; and it is urged in the *Report of the Land Enquiry Committee* that the reason for the small dimensions attained by the movement in England and Wales at the present time is simply "that agricultural co-operation was started considerably later here than elsewhere."³

¹ *Vide Rural Denmark* (1913), p. 188.

² *Vide Report of Land Enquiry* (vol. i.), p. 408.

³ *Vide ibid.* pp. 412, 417.

It is stated that "during the first years of co-operation in other countries, progress was as difficult as we now find it here," and in answer to the contention that the British character is not adapted to co-operation, it is pointed out that "there are more co-operative stores . . . in England than in any country, while England and France lead the way as regards co-operative production in the industrial world."¹ With regard to the special problem of agricultural credit, I have already spoken when dealing with difficulties which tend to prevent the farming class from receiving recruits from the labouring class.² That defective credit also hinders farmers from making the most of their land is indisputable. And the possibilities of co-operation in this matter have been revealed to the admiration of the world by the experience of Germany. In England and Wales at the end of 1911 there were only 45 co-operative credit societies, but in Germany "there are 17,000 local co-operative banks." While the membership of 42 of the British societies—the only ones which reported—merely totalled 765, the membership of 14,993 of the German banks in 1910 was 1,447,766.³

(v.) Another factor, hindering to the full development of English agriculture, is the inferiority of our means for cheap transport of agricultural produce. Comparing the charges for express goods in Belgium with those for passenger trains in England, Mr. Rowntree remarks that "for long distances, say 94 miles, the charges in England are from two to three

¹ *Vide Report of the Land Enquiry*, pp. 412 413

² *Vide supra*, p. 63.

³ *Vide Report of the Land Enquiry*, p. 423.

times as high as in Belgium," and he adds that "even if the English charges per goods train be compared with the Belgian charges per express goods train they are generally higher."¹ In the *Report of the Land Enquiry Committee* there is a most interesting quotation from a schedule which was filled in by the Surveyors' Institution. It is there asserted that "in some districts agriculture is undoubtedly hampered by lack of adequate transit facilities," and stress is laid upon the closing of waterways by railway companies and upon the backwardness of Great Britain in regard to roadside tramways and light railways.² The Report calls attention to the fact that "Belgium has now a mileage of light railways amounting to no less than 22.8 per 100 square miles of territory as compared with only .37 in Great Britain."³

(vi.) It is impossible to enumerate the removable obstacles to agricultural development in England without making some mention of the Game Laws, but I am anxious not to give this subject undue prominence, because it seems to possess a curious power of arousing the most ferocious political passions. I will only remark that the depredations of game may limit the farmer's power of giving employment, even where he is personally compensated by the low level of his rent, and consequently feels no hardship. Such depredations, so far as they go, are clearly equivalent to a reduction—even though it may be but a small reduction—in the area available for profitable cultivation. And at least the bitter zeal of politicians must not be allowed to obscure

¹ *Vide Land and Labour* (1911), p. 285

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 430.

³ *Vide ibid* p. 432

the fact that it is not only politicians who complain of game. "In the south and east of England," writes Mr. A. D. Hall, "the game sometimes are allowed to interfere seriously with the farming."¹

(vii.) Another obstacle to agricultural progress lies in the relationship of landlord and tenant as it obtains in England at the present time. The farmer lacks inducement to invest his capital in improvements; and though it is no doubt true that in practice landlords more often need to be compensated for deterioration than tenants need compensation for improvements, this fact is in itself not a defence, but an indictment of the present system. The subject is a large one, and full of technical difficulties, and a full consideration of it here would be out of place. But a brief review of the most important features of the problem is essential to my argument. The Agricultural Holdings Act of 1908 still leaves it possible for a tenant farmer to be faced with the alternative of paying increased rent on his own improvements or of losing his home. If he wishes to stay on the farm, he must stay on the landlord's terms. Again, if the farm is sold, the tenant can get no compensation for disturbance: the purchaser of an estate, who may have given a high price for it on account of the tenant's improvements, can raise the rent as he pleases, and, in this case, an outgoing farmer can only get compensation for "improvements," and cannot also get compensation for "disturbance."² If he is to avoid paying increased rent

¹ *Vide op. cit.* p. 147.

² This, it seems, depends on the judgment in *Clewshaw v. Briscoe*, *vide Report of Land Enquiry* (vol. i.), p. 288, and for the whole question *ibid.* pp. 283-323; cp. A. C. Pigou, *Wealth and Welfare*, p. 155. There is no doubt that present conditions lead the successful farmer to add farm to farm

on his own improvements, he must leave the farm without any compensation for the loss involved by the necessity of selling or removing his household goods or stock. It is obvious that this state of things must deter some from the extreme step of leaving the farm and cause them to pay the augmented rent. But if a few lose the value of their improvements in this way, many take fright, and enterprise in improvement is discouraged. The grievance can hardly be better stated than it was by an Essex farmer who is quoted in the *Report of the Land Enquiry Committee*. "Security of tenure," he wrote, "is the root of the whole question. Bad farmers are secure because nobody wants their farm. Good farmers have no security, as everybody thinks their farms are inherently good ones. The owner can easily both let and sell at a higher price, and with the best of intentions, he does not realise how much of the fertility of his land is due to his tenant's good farming. Sooner or later the rent will be raised or the property sold."¹ In regard to the general question, the opinion of Professor H. O. Meredith is very much to the point. "Nothing that can be done for the tenant farmer," he writes, "will be of much avail unless we can . . . encourage him to do his best for the land. It is self-evident that this cannot be done under a system of yearly tenancies."² And, to refer once more to the contrast to English conditions presented by Denmark and Belgium, it is important to notice

rather than to apply his capital intensively; cp. H. Rider Haggard, *Rural Denmark* (1913), pp. 258 259.

¹ *Vide Report of Land Enquiry* (vol. i.), p. 297.

² *Vide ibid.* p. 310.

that, whatever may be the case with regard to the law of landlord and tenant, the prevalence of occupying ownership in those two countries insures that the cultivator has there a greater inducement than in England to invest his capital on the land. Whereas in England and Wales only 10.87 per cent of the agricultural land was in 1912 cultivated by its owners, it seems that in Belgium the corresponding figure is 35 per cent according to Mr. Rowntree, or about 50 per cent according to another calculation, while in Denmark no less than 88 per cent of the land is in the hands of the cultivating owners.¹

It would be beyond the scope of the present argument to discuss in detail the merits of the various schemes which have been suggested to insure to the English farmer the reward of efforts put into improvements. All that is essential to my purpose is to show that in the present state of the law of landlord and tenant we have a removable factor which helps to explain the under cultivation of English land as compared with that of Belgium and Denmark. At the same time, as I have referred to the occupying ownership of the Continent, it is necessary to protect myself from misunderstanding by saying that I see no hope of improvement in the scheme of land purchase. The effect of a system of occupying ownership, where it is established, is one thing: the effect of inducing tenants to set about buying their holdings is very different. Instead of leading farmers to invest their savings on the land, the effect of encouraging purchase must be for many years precisely the opposite. The process obviously

¹ *Vide The Land and the People* (in the *Times* series), 1913, p. 80

means that all the spare cash of the farmer must go directly or indirectly in the purchase of his land, rather than in its cultivation. Besides, it is extremely doubtful whether the mere creation of facilities for state-aided purchase would have any appreciable effect beyond increasing the price of the land in the case of those estates which their owners wished to sell. If a really sweeping change was to be produced, it would almost certainly be necessary, not merely to compel owners to sell, but also to compel tenants to buy. And a necessary corollary of that would be to forbid tenants who had bought their land to re-sell it—which, as Euclid would say, is absurd.¹

(viii.) Lastly, there seems good reason to believe that agricultural improvements are hindered in England by the system under which such improvements are rated. In the *Report of the Land Enquiry Committee* the opinion of Professor Marshall is quoted to the effect that "as regards rural land the change most needed in the interest of the community is to diminish the burden of those rates which press differentially against the application of capital to agriculture."²

The arguments of the preceding paragraphs have

¹ At the same time, the establishment of security of tenure, as suggested in the *Report of the Land Enquiry*, seems to me to involve certain dangers, unless carefully safeguarded. It is all-important that the security should not extend so far as (1) to keep a poor farmer on the land when he could be replaced by a better, and (2) to stereotype the size of holdings. These dangers could, however, be averted if sufficiently large powers were given to the Land Court, and if the administration of that court was conducted strictly with a view to the improvement of agriculture and was not deflected by a spirit of ill-considered charity to indigent farmers. Apart from the scheme outlined in the Report, some improvement might possibly be gained by amendment of the Agricultural Holdings Act and by the extension of the Evesham custom. Recent history suggests that the revival of leases would not meet the requirements of tenant farmers.

² *Vide op. cit.* p. 385.

tended to show that the proper development of English agriculture is at present seriously hampered by certain removable obstacles. At the same time the example of Denmark and Belgium suggests that, if all hindrances were removed, the improvement of methods and the extension of enterprise might considerably increase the demand for agricultural labour. And it may be urged that this tendency might be sufficiently strong to counterbalance any forces making for labour displacement which minimum wage regulation might call into place.¹

The necessary reforms would no doubt cost money, but they would as certainly be worth it. And the taxation of landlord's rents for these purposes may perhaps be proposed as a more excellent way of meeting the real needs of rural society than the scheme for transferring part of the Ricardian rent to the labourers, which in the *Report of the Land Enquiry Committee* seems to lie concealed beneath the advocated reduction of rents to meet the cost of the minimum wage. Against taxation of rent to promote agricultural progress it might be possible to urge objections of a doctrinaire nature, based on the consideration that it savours of the principle of "betterment." But that gain would result can scarcely be doubted.

Apart from the removal of obstacles to progress and apart from the improvement of facilities for

¹ My friend Mr. Arthur Ashby, of Ruskin College, Oxford, who is engaged in research under the supervision of the Director of Research in Agricultural Economics at Oxford, tells me he thinks that taking the country as a whole, it would be profitable to increase our crops within three years—without radical changes in method but with slight improvements—by from 25 to 30 per cent. Such an increase of crops would, in his opinion, mean an increase of employment varying from 10 to 30 per cent according to the type of farming.

education and for transport, there remains the possibility of giving a more direct stimulus to the improvement of cultivation by adopting the main principle of the Bill introduced by Mr. William Thorne, and supported by Mr. Philip Snowdon and Mr. Keir Hardie. This Bill provides that any person "who shall hold in any agricultural district any land of more than fifty acres in extent in a waste or uncultivated state, unless such land shall not for any purpose be cultivable with profit, or unless such land shall have been devoted to some purpose of public utility," shall be guilty of misdemeanour. It further provides that "upon conviction of such misdemeanour the Commissioners herein-after appointed to carry out this Act may forthwith eject the person so convicted as to all the lands found by the jury to be so uncultivated, and thereupon the said lands shall thenceforward vest in the said Commissioners," while "the person so convicted and ejected shall be entitled to receive from the Consolidated Fund, for the term of five years from the date of such ejectment, an annual sum equal to the average value of the annual actual produce of the said lands calculated over a term of five years prior to the date of such conviction."¹ If the administrative difficulties connected with legislation of this kind can be surmounted, and if the terms of the Bill are altered to include grossly under-cultivated land, it is obvious that we have here a most powerful engine for agricultural improvement. There is, however, a good hope for

¹ *Vide* A Bill to promote the better cultivation and the compulsory acquisition of land, ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, August 4, 1913 (Bill 300).

reform without immediate recourse to so drastic a remedy.

(c) It remains to consider whether, if any reduction in the number of farm-labourers employed does, in spite of all agricultural improvements, follow minimum wage regulation, there are any factors which may prevent such a displacement of labour from involving actual unemployment. This is a large question and it can only be dealt with in this essay in an extremely summary fashion.¹

Many hopes have been raised by schemes for the development of State Forests. But authorities are divided as to the merits of such schemes, and it can hardly be maintained that the effect of afforestation on the rural labour market would be large or be felt to its full extent before many years had passed. The Royal Commission on Coast Erosion and Afforestation (1908) considered that 9 million acres of land might profitably be afforested in the United Kingdom; and it was recommended that 150,000 acres should be planted each year. It is asserted that after the land is planted permanent employment would be found for one man per 100 acres. But allowance must be made for the displacement of labourers previously employed on the land that is turned into forest. That land is estimated to consist of rough grazing land and poor arable land in the proportion of 8 to 1, and the men displaced would, it is said, be one man per 1000 acres of the grazing land and 3 men per 100

¹ My arrangement of the subject may perhaps be objected to on the ground that it involves "cross division"; and certainly small holdings come into both sections (b) and (c), because Belgium is a land of small holdings and I have already had occasion to compare English and Belgian conditions. But if formally objectionable, I may plead for my arrangement as making for clearness.

acres of the arable. Thus each annual increase of the forest area by 150,000 acres would only involve an increase of some 867 in the number of men permanently employed on the land, though at the end of sixty years, when the forests had reached their full extent, the total increase would amount to 52,000. At the same time it must be remembered that the planting of the forests at the rate of 150,000 acres per annum would give temporary employment each winter to 18,000 men, and the provision of this winter employment would no doubt afford a good deal of assistance to the development of small holdings. "On the Continent," writes Professor Somerville, "most of the winter work in the forests is performed by men who, during summer, are engaged in agricultural operations, generally on their own holdings."¹

This brings us to a much more important possibility. The development of small holdings may provide a refuge for labourers displaced by minimum wage regulation. With regard to the general possibilities of the small holding under present market conditions, little need be said here, for the whole subject has been admirably discussed in Professor Hermann Levy's well-known book.² It is more important to notice (i.) that, as Prof. Levy observes, "small farming needs . . . more labour than does large farming,"³ and (ii.) that a rise in

¹ *Vide* W. Somerville, "Forestry in some of its Economic Aspects," *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 1909, p. 49; cp. Review of the Second Report of the Commission on Afforestation, *ib.* pp. 123-126.

² Hermann Levy, *Large and Small Holdings*, 1911.

³ *Vide op cit.* p. 117. The case of Belgium may be cited in support of this contention. It will be remembered that in Belgium 72 males are employed in agriculture per square mile of land as compared with 28 in England and Wales, and Mr Rowntree remarks that "the average size of

agricultural wages would probably give a powerful stimulus to the development of small holdings. The higher wages of the labourers still retained in employment would enable them to enjoy more of the luxuries of working-class diet—bacon, butter, eggs, and poultry. But these are the very commodities in the production of which the small holder excels. His market would therefore be improved. This might also be brought about in another way. Higher agricultural wages, especially if accompanied by a speeding up of agricultural work, may cause labourers to buy vegetables instead of raising all they consume by their own toil on allotments. And in so far as a rise in agricultural wages may be expected to tend towards lower rents, this is a factor which should assist the small holder. His position is not altered by the rise in wages, for he employs no labour. Even the holder of a medium-sized farm will feel the stress of minimum wage regulation less than the larger farmer, for his own labour and that of his family plays a larger part in the economy of his farm. Thus the small farmers will have an advantage. Either they will share in the reduction of rents without feeling the increased costliness of labour which has caused that reduction, or else the fact that they can still afford the old rents while the large wage-paying farmers can only afford to pay a reduced rent will make landlords more willing to split up farms and let their land in small holdings.

the holdings in Belgium is smaller than in any other country of Europe," *vide Land and Labour* (1911), p. 107. In the pamphlet on Unionist Agricultural Policy it is stated that the conversion of some large farms into small holdings in Cheshire raised the number of persons on the area from 98 to 432, *vide op. cit.* pp. 23-24.

The change must either increase the profitableness of the small holding or the willingness of landlords to create small holdings. It must produce an increase either in the demand for such holdings or in their supply.

It may, however, be objected (i.) that an improvement in the efficiency of labourers, leading to a reduction in the number employed by the wage-paying farmers, is most likely to occur in the counties where wages are now exceptionally low, while these counties may be very unsuited to small holdings, and (ii.) that the men selected for dismissal, when the number employed is reduced, are not likely to be men particularly suited to manage a small holding.

Now to the first of these objections it may be replied that the districts least suitable for small holdings are those most suited to corn-growing, and that here the increased profitableness of corn-growing, with its resultant tendency to cause an extension of the arable area, should prevent the tendency towards a reduction of agricultural employment from being so strong here as elsewhere. Again, even the slight development of small holdings already attained is sufficient to disprove the contention that they cannot prosper in the counties of low wages. The average total earnings of all classes of farm labourers are lowest in Oxfordshire, Dorset, Norfolk, and Suffolk, but the number of holdings of between 1 and 50 acres per 1000 acres under crops and grass was in 1911 in each of these counties respectively 6.39, 7.13, 8.67, and 6.15. The corresponding figure for Northumberland, where wages are higher than in any other English

county except Durham, is only 4.48. The case of Gloucestershire is even more remarkable. Agricultural wages in Gloucestershire are considerably below the average, but there are 10.32 holdings of between 1 and 50 acres to every 1000 acres under crops and grass in the county. In Gloucestershire and in Norfolk the percentage of the total number of holdings which come within this class is higher than it is in England generally or in Great Britain as a whole.¹ The second objection, so far as it goes, is perhaps more serious. But it does not affect the contention that the development of small holdings, stimulated by the rise in wages, would tend to prevent that rise from causing a diminution in the agricultural population. It can only be urged against the opinion that small holdings would be a refuge for the individuals dismissed and would tend to prevent them from feeling the troubles of unemployment. And even in this respect the validity of the objection may be questioned. It is by no means certain that English farmers would dismiss first those least able to manage a small holding, for they are often rather in the habit of regarding the most independent men as their least profitable servants. And even if no discharged farm labourers acquired small holdings the development of such holdings would none the less absorb some individuals and so might create vacancies in the village economy which the unemployed farm labourers might fill.

¹ The figures are Gloucestershire, 68.84 per cent; Norfolk, 67.43 per cent; England, 66.77 per cent; Great Britain, 67.15 per cent. These figures are derived from, and those in the text above are calculated from others given in the *Agricultural Statistics for 1911*, Cd. 6021, p. 74 *et passim*.

There is yet another way in which the extension of the small holding system might in time improve the situation created by the enforcement of a minimum wage for agricultural labourers. An increase in the number of small holdings, by providing a ladder by which labourers of ability might rise to prosperity, might increase the level of ability among the large farmers, for it would enable their class to recruit itself from a wider social area than had previously been available.¹ And it is important to notice that the new recruits, coming from labourers' families, would in all probability have a lower standard of personal expenditure and be willing to exercise their energies for smaller profits than the hereditary farmers with their traditions of the "good old days."

From these considerations certain practical conclusions follow. Minimum wage regulation in agriculture should be accompanied by vigorous encouragement of small holdings and devised with a tender regard for those past middle age, who cannot be expected to find a refuge on a small holding if they are dismissed, while their chance of dismissal is all the greater, because the better feeding made possible by higher wages is less likely with them than with the young to lead to improved physique and increased efficiency. I am inclined to think that it would be well to have a lower minimum rate for men over 50 or 55; but the age limit for this lower wage might be gradually raised, for the men who were younger than 50 or 55 when the minimum

¹ Cp. Lord Carrington's remarks in his Introduction to Gilbert Slater, *The English Peasantry and the Enclosure of Common Fields*, London, 1907, p. xii

wage was first established might show a response to better feeding in improved physique. These are, however, matters on which physiologists might give an opinion. With regard to small holdings, though measures external to the minimum wage regulations would have to be devised for their encouragement, it is possible that careful provisions connected with those regulations might be some help. For instance, if to prevent a growth of casual employment a higher minimum rate was fixed for casual workers, it would be advisable to create an exception in favour of those workers who are also small holders. The small holder finds casual work for a wage-paying farmer a valuable source of subsidiary earnings, and such a provision as I have suggested would lead farmers to employ small holders for casual work in preference to other men. Again it would lead small holders—who need casual help at certain seasons—to employ one another, and this might breed a spirit of co-operation and so promote the welfare of small holdings to no small degree.

The problem of rural education is one which touches all these other problems intimately, but it is too large to be dealt with here. I will only state my opinion that the great danger which faces elementary education in our villages to-day is the pursuit of practical agricultural subjects at the expense of the literary curriculum. Anything which makes the village boy less fitted to find employment in the town is likely to add great difficulties to the task of raising agricultural wages, for it will tend to create a reserve of labour in the rural districts. And neglect of general and literary education,

by narrowing the outlook and impoverishing the sympathies of those whose future career will lie on a small holding, must make against the growth of that spirit of intelligent co-operation which all agree to be the most crying need of the small holding movement.

There is no need to attempt a formal summary of the conclusions towards which the arguments of the preceding pages have been tending. They suggest that a rise in agricultural wages is possible, and that the rise should, as a rule, be greater in the low-wage than in the high-wage districts. They point to unemployment as the one danger against which safeguards require to be provided; but at the same time they indicate that a tendency towards a reduction in the volume of agricultural employment may very well be only the "shadow side" of a progress which means improvement in the efficiency of farm labourers and an augmentation of the national dividend. It appears too that the danger of unemployment might be mitigated and even reduced to insignificance by supplementary measures, of which the chief aim should be the development of agricultural science and enterprise and the encouragement of small holdings. As to the extent to which agricultural wages might be raised, either generally or in different districts, nothing has been said. That can best be discovered, not by the reasoning of the economist, but by daring and yet careful and sympathetic experiment, carried out either through the agency of Wages Boards established for each county, or by the determination of some central authority after careful inquiry into local conditions.

APPENDIX I

THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FARM LABOURERS IN
ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1901 AND 1911 COM-
PARED WITH THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ALL
OCCUPIED MALES [*vide Census of England and Wales*,
1901, Cd. 1523, pp. 186 and 190, and *Census of England*
and Wales, 1911, Cd. 7019, vol. x. Part II, pp. 2 and 3].

OCCUPIED MALES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1901 AT TEN AGE GROUPS.*

* Each column gives the numbers over the age which is given at the head of that column and under the age which is given at the head of the next column to the right. The last column but one gives the numbers of those over the age given at the head of the column.

	10 Years	14 Years	15 Years.	20 Years.	25 Years	35 Years	45 Years.	55 Years	65 Years.	75 Years	Total.
Farm-bailiffs and foremen	..	..	193	1,044	4,479	6,056	5,603	3,613	1,388	247	22,623
Shepherds	418	532	2,154	1,835	4,599	5,325	4,720	3,613	1,769	389	25,354
Agricultural labourers in charge of cattle	3,070	4,546	17,715	8,240	14,475	13,009	9,618	6,848	3,237	544	81,302
Agricultural labourers in charge of horses	2,982	4,417	36,751	26,120	31,600	24,930	15,462	8,798	2,970	347	154,377
Agricultural labourers not distinguished	9,840	12,758	55,548	33,431	51,966	49,946	46,885	44,733	33,317	9,648	348,072
Total agricultural labourers and shepherds (not including bailiffs and foremen)	16,310	22,253	112,168	69,626	102,640	93,210	76,685	63,992	41,293	10,928	609,105
Total occupied males (all occupations)	138,130	227,075	1,475,987	1,433,629	2,442,667	1,889,184	1,341,324	808,148	329,470	71,362	10,156,976

• OCCUPIED MALES IN ENGLAND AND WALES IN 1911 AT FOURTEEN AGE GROUPS. •

* Each column gives the numbers over the age which is given at the head of that column and under the age which is given at the head of the next column to the right. The last column but one gives the numbers of those over the age given at the head of the column

	10 Years	13 Years	14 Years	15 Years	16 Years	17 Years	18 Years	19 Years	20 Years	25 Years	35 Years	45 Years	55 Years	65 Years	Total.
Farm - bailiffs and foremen . . .			..	3	4	22	39	74	987	4,181	6,022	5,780	3,520	1,509	22,141
Shepherds . . .	6	82	272	316	365	334	337	345	1,695	3,655	4,418	4,386	2,977	1,650	20,838
Agricultural labourers in charge of cattle	76	684	2,557	3,333	3,596	3,396	3,003	2,502	9,321	13,394	11,689	8,963	4,644	1,936	69,094
Agricultural labourers in charge of horses	18	571	1,720	2,823	4,471	5,743	6,409	6,206	24,642	29,281	20,555	15,784	7,490	2,409	128,122
Agricultural labourers not distinguished .	300	6,154	14,599	16,787	16,973	15,337	13,690	11,954	47,785	71,366	60,233	59,460	48,507	41,918	425,063
Total agricultural labourers including shepherds (excluding bailiffs and foremen) . . .	400	7,491	19,148	23,259	25,405	24,810	23,439	21,007	83,443	117,696	96,895	88,593	63,618	47,913	643,117
Total occupied males (all occupations) .	21,580	75,561	222,854	278,275	303,152	309,029	317,449	310,060	1,462,949	2,792,758	2,296,211	1,638,668	971,801	453,318	11,453,665

APPENDIX II

THE COMPARATIVE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTIES OF DURHAM, LANCASHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, AND DORSETSHIRE, IN 1911 [*vide Census of England and Wales, 1911, vol. x Part ii. Cd. 7019, pp. 102, 108, 204, and 462*].

COMPARATIVE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS (INCLUDING SHEPHERDS, AND MEN IN CHARGE
OF CATTLE OR HORSES, BUT EXCLUDING FARM BAILIFFS AND FOREMEN) IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE COUNTIES
OF DURHAM, LANCASHIRE, OXFORDSHIRE, AND DORSETSHIRE IN 1911 AT FOURTEEN AGE GROUPS *

* Each column gives the numbers over the age which is given at the head of that column and under the age which is given at the head of the next column to the right. The last column but one contains the numbers of all over 65 years of age.

	10 Years	13 Years	14 Years	15 Years	16 Years	17 Years	18 Years	19 Years	20 Years	25 Years	35 Years	45 Years	55 Years	65 Years	Total
Durham. (Average earnings 22s.)	2	6	118	199	270	264	273	277	937	1,061	785	604	419	232	5,447
Lancashire. (Average earnings 21s.)	40	206	433	572	662	668	664	682	2,810	3,599	2,455	1,944	1,375	758	16,868
Oxfordshire. (Average earnings 16s. 4d.)	4	234	380	429	468	426	420	325	1,423	2,025	1,849	1,806	1,417	1,041	12,247
Dorset. (Average earnings 16s. 6d.)	8	45	333	400	399	443	365	358	1,432	2,002	1,798	1,690	1,192	845	11,310

APPENDIX III

THE AGE DISTRIBUTION OF AGRICULTURAL LABOURERS AND THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE COUNTIES OF HIGH AND LOW WAGES.

THE second part of volume x. of the Census of 1911 (Cd. 7019)—the introductory letter of which is dated November 15, 1913—was issued after the MS of the preceding chapters had already gone to the press ; and though I have been able in most of the book to introduce the new information while correcting the proofs, its bearing upon the argument in Chapter III. seemed to require consideration in an Appendix

The Tables in Appendix II. show that in each of the two low-wage counties, Oxfordshire and Dorset, the proportion of farm labourers over forty-five years of age is considerably greater than it is either in Durham or in Lancashire, which are counties of exceptionally high wages. This fact affects the comparison between the conditions in Durham and those of Dorset which is made in Chapter III. It suggests that the apparently inferior productivity of the labourers in Dorset may be partly due to the difference in age distribution and not entirely to the causes mentioned in the text. And in this connection several points seem worthy of consideration :—

1. The fact that the average wage-rates given in Cd. 5460 are based on the wages of adult able-bodied men seems to indicate—what my own observations in Oxfordshire would suggest—that the low average rates are due, not to a lowering of the average by the inclusion of old men receiving peculiarly low wages, but to a low standard rate, which is possibly made lower than it otherwise would be by the fact that a large proportion of those earning the standard rate are over forty-five. The younger men, though worth more, are paid the same as the elder men. But in so far as the low productivity of the total labour force in

Dorset can be explained by the large proportion of elderly men employed, it becomes unnecessary to suppose that the younger men earning the standard rate are less efficient than those of Durham—to take the two counties considered in Chapter III. And if they are not inferior in efficiency, the possibility of a specially large rise in wages in the case of these men becomes all the greater, and it becomes all the less likely that unemployment would result.

2 At the same time, it is clear that where the proportion of elderly men is large the number unable to earn a minimum wage suitable for men in the prime of life must be especially great. On the other hand, it is equally clear that where the elderly are many the mobility of labour is peculiarly slight, and this fact must tend to make labour in general peculiarly cheap to the employer. Hence, in such a district, the wages of the older men, as well as those of the younger, are more susceptible of improvement than those of men of the same ages in other districts. The moral is obvious. Different minimum wage-rates must be established for men of different ages: the case of those past middle life must not be met merely by exemption from the minimum wage law. It is the chief defect of the two minimum wage bills introduced in 1913 that they do not provide for the establishment of different rates for young and old, as well as for those in the prime of life. To those incapable of earning the minimum rate of their district both bills offer only special exemption—that is to say, exemption granted to the individual by an official. In their treatment of boys the two bills differ in an interesting manner. The Unionist Bill—that introduced by Mr. Hills and ordered to be printed on May 7 (Bill 173)—only provides that a minimum wage shall be imposed in the case of persons “of full age.” It would therefore put a premium upon the employment of persons under 21 whose wages it does nothing to raise. The Labour Party Bill (Bill 182), which was ordered to be printed on May 27, provides for the establishment of a single minimum wage-rate for each county, and this is apparently to apply to all agricultural labourers except those who receive individual exemptions. Unless then all boys receive individual exemptions, which would be a clumsy way of making the bill similar to that of Mr. Hills, it is clear that most boys working on farms would be dismissed if this bill became law.

3. The striking contrast between the age distribution of farm labourers in Durham and Lancashire on the one hand and in Dorset and Oxfordshire on the other hand—shown by the Table in Appendix II.—raises the important question whether a

similar contrast can be drawn in general between the high-wage and low-wage counties. I am sorry that I have not had time to examine the evidence thoroughly. But such figures as I have collected for other counties from the new volume of the census make it pretty clear that there is no *general* contrast of this kind. The uncertainty attaching to a "first count" prevents me from being sure of the absolute accuracy of these figures, but if there is any error, it cannot be considerable. Taking only those agricultural labourers who were *not* distinguished as shepherds or as being in charge of cattle or horses, it appears that in the four counties in which the average earnings of such labourers was in 1907 (according to Cd 5460) 16s. or under, *i.e.* in Oxfordshire, Suffolk, Norfolk, and Wiltshire, the number of men over 45 was about 34 per cent of the total number, while those over 55 were some 20 per cent of the whole. In the eight counties where the average earnings of ordinary agricultural labourers amounted to more than 19s, *i.e.* in Cumberland, Westmoreland, Yorkshire, Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Middlesex, and Derbyshire, some 32 per cent of the men were over 45 and some 19 per cent of them over 55 years old. On the other hand, in the two counties where the *ordinary* agricultural earnings are nearest the average for the whole of England, *i.e.* in Cornwall and Hants (excluding the Isle of Wight), about 37 per cent of the "ordinary" men were over 45 and some 22 per cent more than 55. These facts suggest that, though the age distribution of the labourers is an important fact to be considered when minimum wage-rates are fixed for any county, it is not in differences of age distribution that we can find any explanation of the differences in wages between counties as a general rule.

THE END

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